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OLIVIA SHEEHAN

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[YOUR LETTERS]

HBK DOING THE RIGHT THING

You can't blame Shawn Michaels for making a deal with the devil, *err* JBL. Wrestling, like many professional sports, is physically challenging to the point where many wrestlers have short and/or unfulfilled careers. Those lucky enough to go into other things like acting are the fortunate ones.

But Michaels has a good point in not wanting to be washed up and making peanuts when he has already drunk from the golden cup. I may not like HBK, but his need to take care of his family far surpasses the need to please the fans.

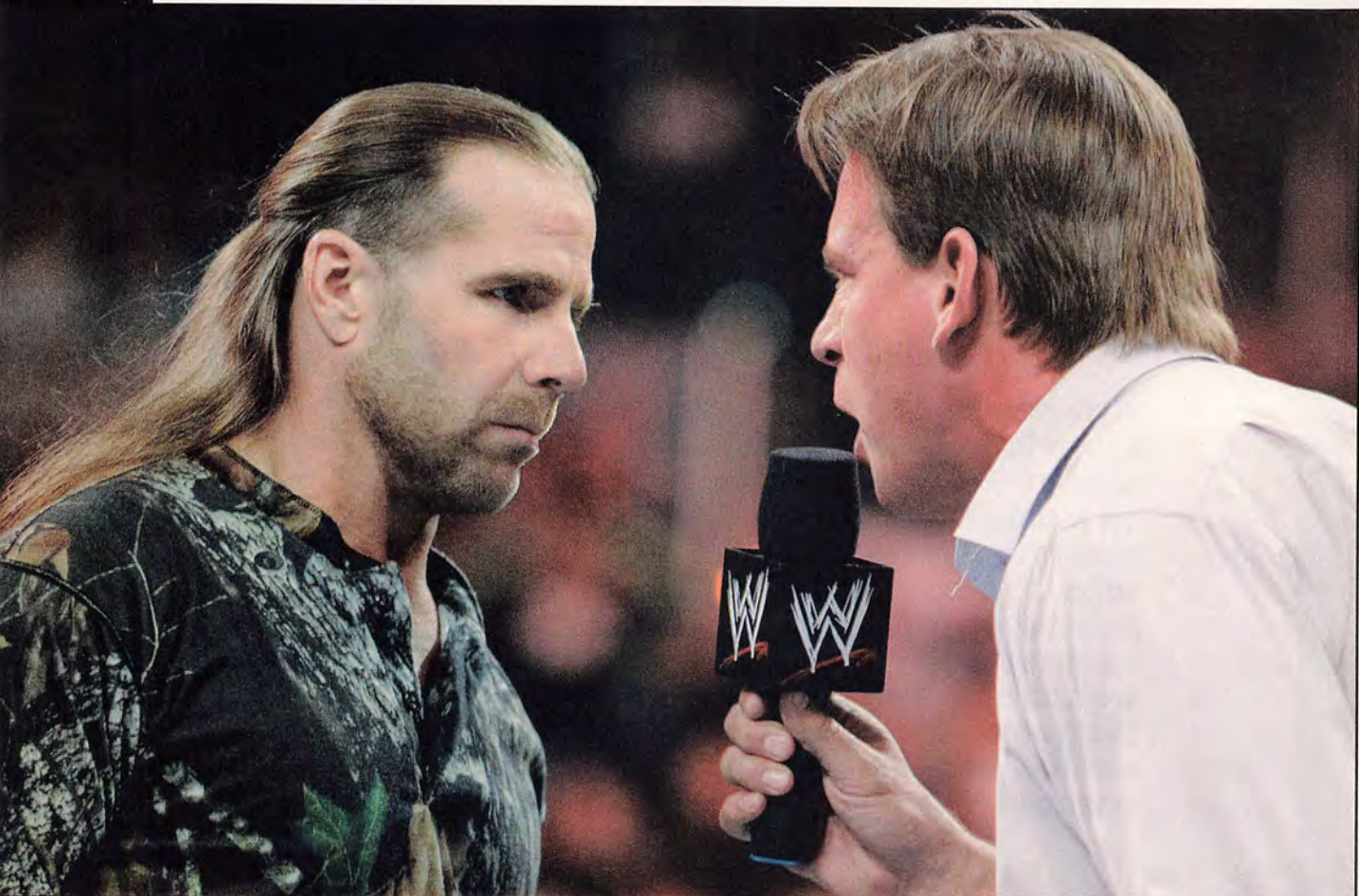
Every wrestler working today needs to keep in mind that the hourglass on their careers is constantly running.

REY SIFUENTES JR.
Kingsville, TX

LA DIVA

In the past few years WWE has been working on improving the quality of its women's matches. For the first time ever, Smackdown has a group of capable women that is more than three people deep. The inception of the Diva's championship provided something for them to aim for and angles to play out. In my opinion, the breakout star of the budding division is Maryse.

Maryse has gone from being a Diva Search castoff and greeting fans back to Smackdown in broken English to being easily the top female heel on Smackdown. Her in-ring work has improved by leaps and bounds compared to her clumsy attempts at kicking Cherry in the face. Her progress was showcased in WWE by having Maryse eliminate three women from the Raw team and



The "Heartbreak Kid" has never had to answer to anyone for what he has done in the ring. But with a recent financial crisis hitting his family, reader Rey Sifuentes Jr. understands why Michaels now reports to JBL.

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remaining as the last Smackdown lady left standing at Survivor Series.

Also, her persona suits her perfectly. She plays it up with ease and stands out from a lot of the other women who sometimes appear to be devoid of personality.

WWE itself even showed how much faith it has in Maryse when it gave her an opportunity to wear the Divas championship belt. Just like her Canadian predecessor, Trish Stratus, Maryse took full advantage of her chance and snatched the title from Michelle McCool.

Here's to hoping we see a lot more of Maryse in the future, as she really makes the Smackdown Divas something enjoyable to watch, again.

JEROMME GRAHAM
jeromme_alexi@hotmail.com

TURKEYS TAKE FLIGHT

I recently caught the "Turnbuckle Turkeys" issue of *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* (Vol. 25, 2009) and many names were very deserving of this dubious honor. World Wrestling Entertainment Chairman and CEO Vince McMahon, Hall of Famers Bret "Hitman" Hart and Hulk Hogan, and hardcore legend The Sandman. All of these guys were "winners" in 2008, and very deserving of the honor you bestowed upon them.

Keep up the good work, guys. With the way things are starting off in 2009, this year's "Turnbuckle Turkeys" list could be one of the most interesting in the history of your magazines!

CARLOS MARTINEZ
Locovaquero576@aim.com

HARDY WINS GOLD, FINALLY

Jeff Hardy is my absolute favorite wrestler in the entire WWE. I have a pair of armbands, the pendant he wears, and a couple of T-shirts to boot—I even went so far as to cut the armbands to look like his. That is why I was super pumped when he won the WWE title at Armageddon back on December 14, 2008. It was everything I could have hoped for.

Hardy against both Edge and Triple-H, title on the line, and the excitement of just watching the "Rainbow-Haired Warrior" do what he does best. I'm glad he finally took advantage of the opportunities he was given to shine on one of WWE's biggest stages and show the rest of the roster that Jeff Hardy is here to stay.

I always knew Jeff could do it; he just had that something special in the way he worked that always shined

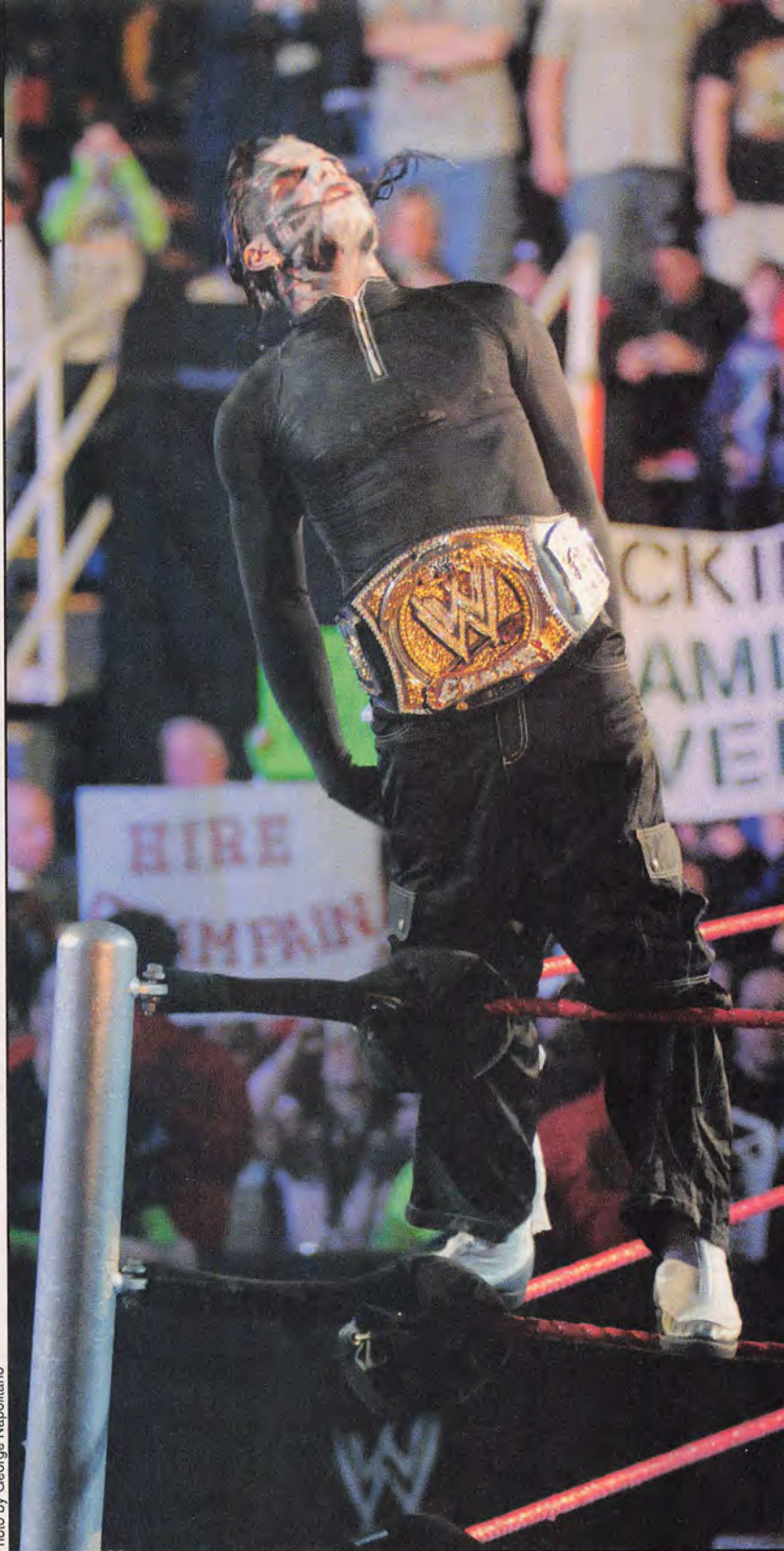


Photo by George Napolitano

Although his title run was ended prematurely, reader Jason Burner feels that another Jeff Hardy title reign is in the future. Hardy is one of the most popular stars in WWE, and another championship would only help solidify his appeal.

through in his performances. I hope that another Jeff Hardy title run is in the future, because it was really entertaining while it lasted.

JASON BURNER
drakeburner4@hotmail.com □

WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY BRADY HICKS ■■■■■

IT SEEMS LIKELY that once **Matt Hardy** works out his differences with brother **Jeff**, he'll have to fight off an angry **Shane "Hurricane" Helms**.

Helms, who rose through the indy and pro ranks alongside the Hardys, has been none-to-pleased with Matt's behavior of late.

While Helms is indeed hot over the fact that Matt caused Jeff to lose the WWE heavyweight title at The Royal Rumble, he's even more incensed by what he believes is a dishonest explanation from Matt, who claimed that he turned on Jeff because he was tired of "cleaning up Jeff's messes."

"That is pure, 100 percent bull!" Helms said. "I've thought about this a lot, and I'm not buying Matt's explanation. Matt and Jeff have leaned on each other for years. Suddenly, Jeff's a burden? I'm not buying it. I think **Edge** got in his ear, or bought him off, or something."

That Matt would hurt his own flesh and blood in service to Edge, one of the sport's most odious conmen, is also gnawing at the North Carolina native.

"I don't look forward to beating some sense into Matt's thick skull," Helms admitted, "but nobody knows those boys like I do, and it's my place to do something."

While Helms fixes for a fight, actor **Mickey Rourke** recently evaded one with **Chris Jericho**. Rourke, the actor who portrayed aging wrestler **Randy "The Ram" Robinson** in **Darren Aronofsky's** *The Wrestler*, found himself backing off a WrestleMania challenge he had issued to Jericho in jest.

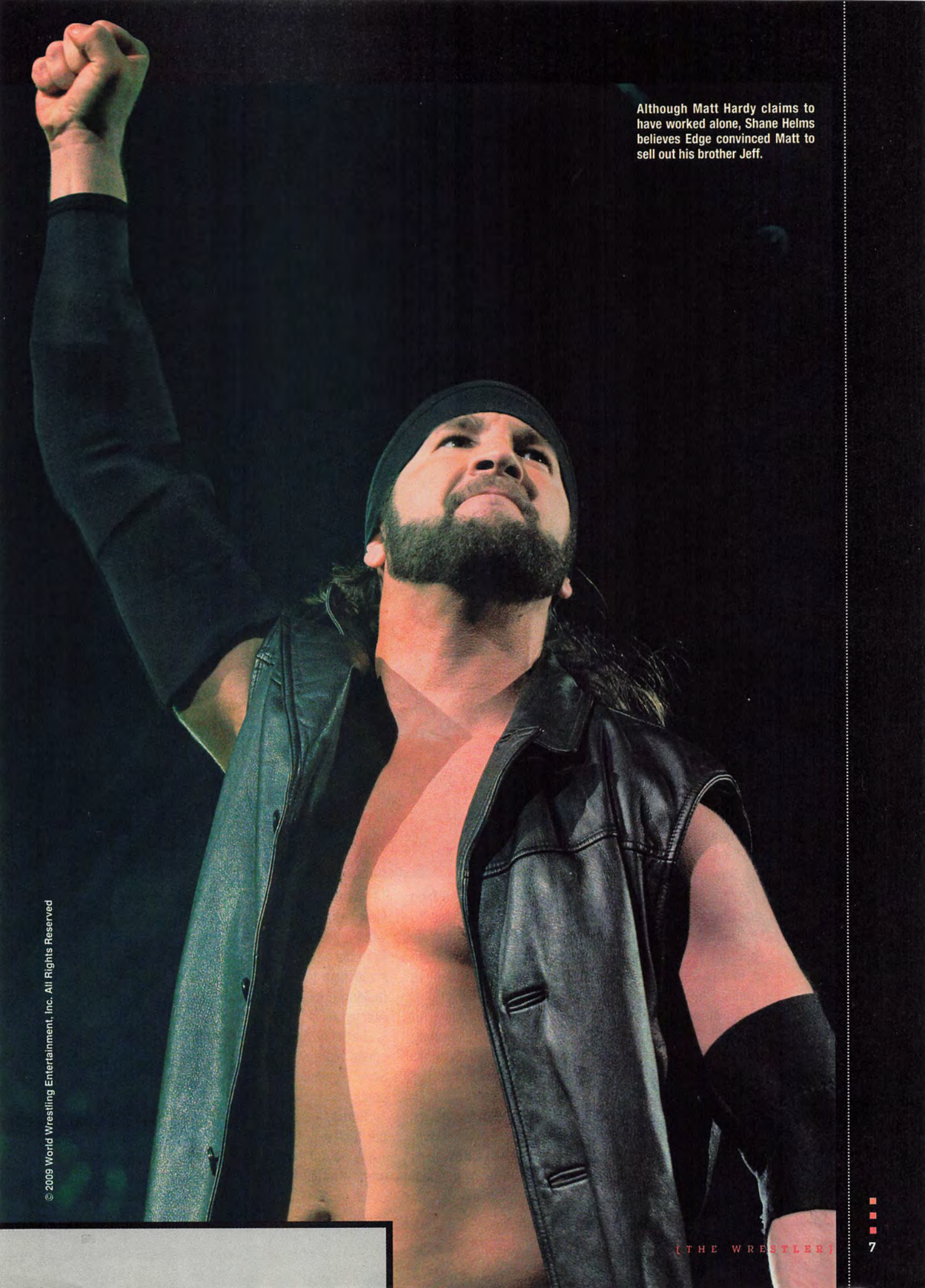
Jericho responded to the challenge by making a guest appear-

ance during Rourke's interview on *Larry King Live*, with Rourke going on to say he only jokingly challenged Jericho and that he has all the respect in the world for the former champion and what he does for a living.



Rourke claimed his WrestleMania challenge to Jericho was made in jest, but Jericho wasn't laughing when he appeared on *Larry King Live*.

Photo by George Napolitano



Although Matt Hardy claims to have worked alone, Shane Helms believes Edge convinced Matt to sell out his brother Jeff.

Jericho did not return the compliment. Instead, he said that while he enjoyed the movie, he had absolutely no respect for the star or what he has accomplished. Despite this verbal slap, Rourke had to be glad Jericho was just video-phoning in, which allowed him to escape the incident sans a **Jerry Lawler-Andy Kaufman**-style attack. And because the war of words did not escalate, Rourke can now safely make an appearance at WrestleMania 25 if he desires ... unless, of course, Jericho decides to confront him at the event.

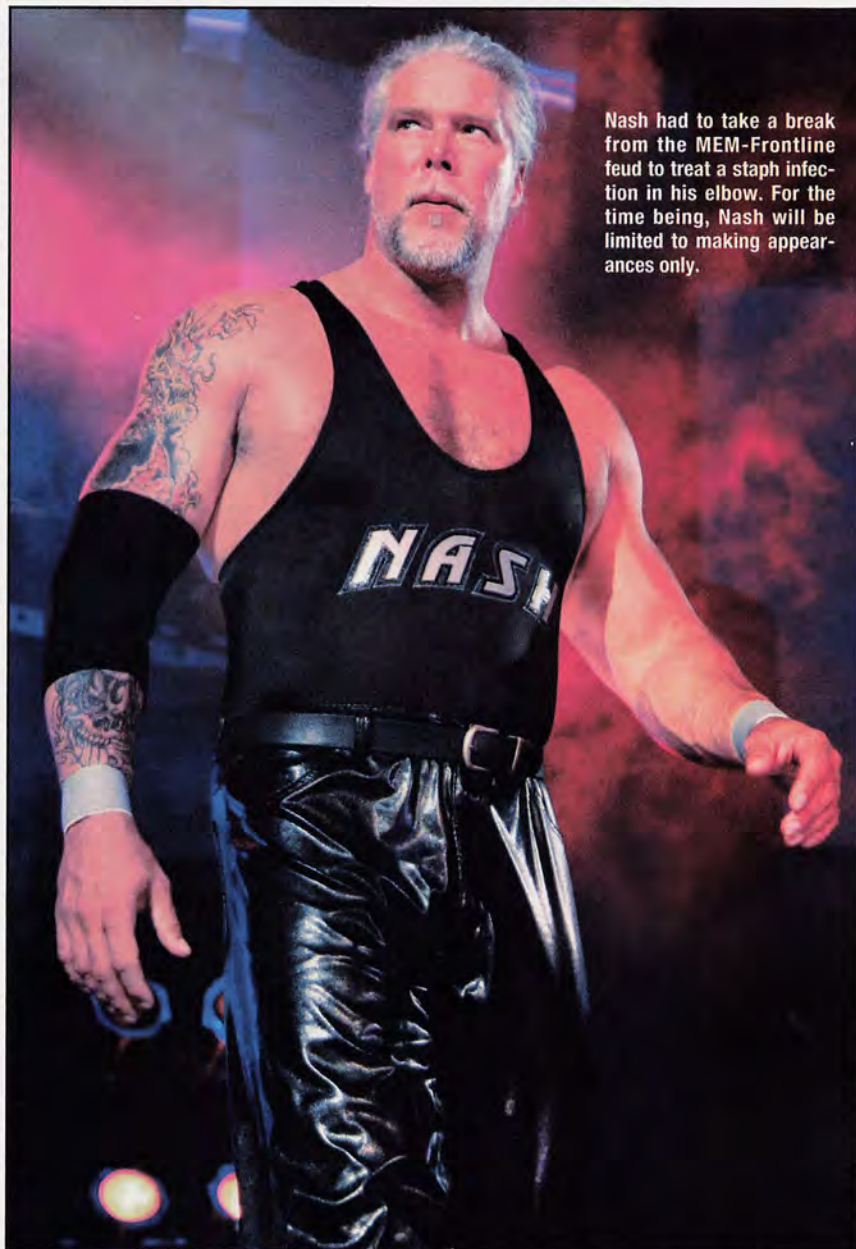
One wrestler that won't be making an appearance at WM 25, even though he most certainly would love to, is **Batista**. "The Animal" elected to undergo surgery to repair a torn hamstring. Because his rehab is expected to last a minimum of six months, the former champ is certain to miss this year's card.

While Batista's absence from WM25 no doubt will disappoint many fans, here's some news that might cheer them up: **Trish Stratus** may be there.

Stratus, who still has a strong online presence, said in her WWE Universe blog that she would love to have a match at WrestleMania 25 in Houston, Texas. While she admitted WWE officials had not yet contacted her regarding a match, the mere rumor of her in-ring return should be enough to inspire additional PPV buys.

Stratus, who had a return match on Raw at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto in late-December, teaming with **John Cena** against **Beth Phoenix** and **Santino Marella**, showed virtually no ring rust in hitting all her patented moves and helping her team to victory.

Another upside to a Trish return: Some of the newer Divas (think **Kelly Kelly** and the **Bella Twins**) would certainly benefit from working with the woman who is widely considered the best female performer of the past decade. Let's hope **Vince McMahon** agrees.



Nash had to take a break from the MEM-Frontline feud to treat a staph infection in his elbow. For the time being, Nash will be limited to making appearances only.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Another big man that has already lost one pay-per-view payday to the injury bug is **Kevin Nash**. "Big Sexy" went under the knife to have a staph infection removed from his elbow. The operation left Nash with a golf ball-sized hole in his arm. The ordeal has limited Nash to making appearances only and caused him to miss the Against All Odds PPV in early-February.

Let's hope Nash can find a constructive way to spend his down time. The last thing TNA needs is "Big Sexy" focusing his attention on backstage issues and politics.

Some fans of **Team 3-D** were justifiably anxious that the four-way title match also involving **Sting** and **Kurt Angle** at Against All Odds could spell the end of the legendary tandem. After all, singles gold has broken up other great teams in the past, and **Brothers Ray** and



Brother Ray hoists his half of the IWGP tag team title. Fans who were anticipating a Team 3-D split have nothing to fear.

Devon were forced to fight it out over the TNA World title at some points during the match.

But the brothers calmed those fears when Ray laid down for Devon to pin him (Angle rushed in to break up the pin attempt). If that wasn't confirmation of the team's ongoing solidarity, their New Japan Pro Wrestling's IWGP tag team championship victory over **Togi Makabe** and **Toru Yano** should convince fans that Team 3-D remains as committed as ever to tag team excellence.

On a more somber note, the wrestling community has again been forced to say goodbye to several stars in recent months. First up, is 6'6" independent wrestler **Paul E. Normous (Paul Fuchs)**, 33, a trainee of **Gino Caruso** and **Jason Knight**, who was most recently featured in a cameo in *The Wrestler*. No official cause of death was given as of press time. Heartfelt thoughts also go out to those close with **Lanny Keane**, who died of a heart attack at 48. Keane is better known to old school WWF fans as **Hillbilly Jim's** cousin, **Cousin Junior**, and to Memphis fans as **Moondog Cujo**.

Finally, the battle is over for **Dianna Moody**, who succumbed to cancer in early-February. Condolences go out to her friends, family, and, most of all,



Lanny Keane gained his biggest fame as Cousin Junior in the WWF during the mid-1980s. But, it was his role as Moondog Cujo vs. Jeff Jarrett and Jerry Lawler in the USWA that earned him a *PWI* award for Feud of the Year.

her husband of 32 years, **Bill Moody**, better known to fans as **Percy Pringle** and **Paul Bearer**. Twice during her life, Moody battled cancer and had her hand raised in victory. Unfortunately, she is now being mourned by her husband and two sons. □

"LASTING DUTY"

By Lash LeRoux



> WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

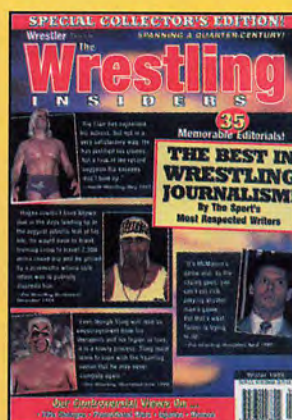
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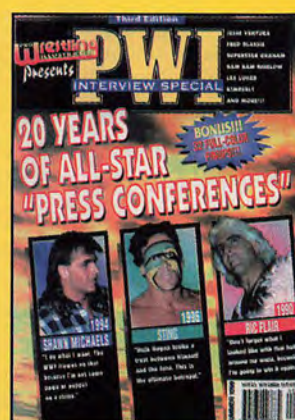
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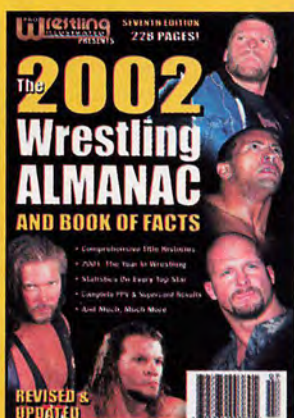
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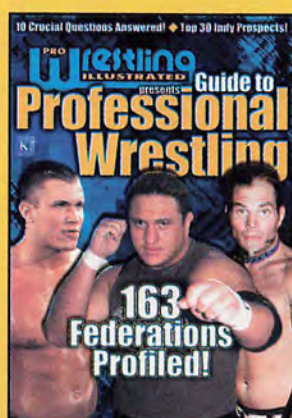
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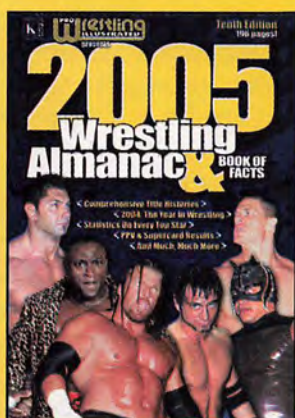
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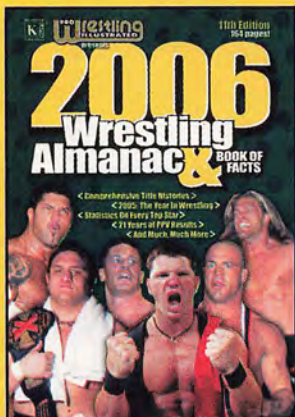
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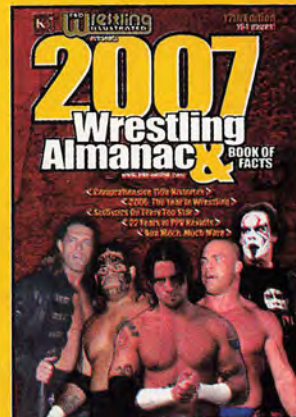
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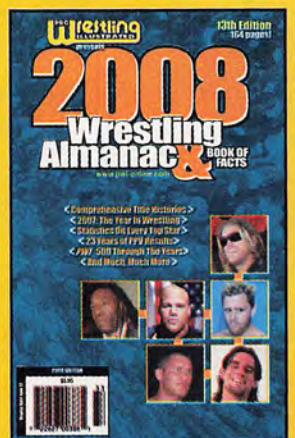
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COLLECTOR'S ISSUES

KREW - CUTS

BY FRANK KREWDA

WWE NOTES ... As popular and talented as Jeff Hardy is, the "black cloud" storyline, in which bad things happen to the "Charismatic Enigma" wherever he goes, is bad for WWE and for wrestling.

It is exactly the type of angle that—depending on how it plays out—can draw negative publicity to the sport. As of this writing, Hardy had been portrayed as the victim of a hit-and-run auto accident and entrance pyro gone awry. No problem there. Jeff seems none the worse for wear after enduring those mishaps. But going forward, WWE must now expose him to gradually more perilous misfortune if it hopes to stoke fans' sympathy for Hardy, which is the key to making the angle work. WWE has already employed cars and fire. What's next on Smackdown—Hardy's parachute fails after he skydives from a plane? It's no secret that Jeff is a risk-taker by nature in the ring, but exploiting that character trait outside the ring could backfire. Should something genuinely

horrific befall Hardy while this storyline evolves, WWE could be facing another Owen Hart scenario ... If C.M. Punk's career ended today, he wouldn't go down in history as a particularly dominant WWE World champion. But would he be remembered as a "Grand Slam" champion? To become a WWE Grand Slam champion—a distinction coined by Shawn Michaels in the mid-'90s—a wrestler must win four titles (three tiers of heavyweight belts and a tag team title). While Punk has won the World, tag team, and Intercontinental belts, he's never captured the U.S. or now-defunct European title. He did, however, win the ECW heavyweight title, which WWE may or may not consider a viable alternative to the U.S. or European belts. Should WWE in fact bestow that designation on Punk, he will have achieved his Grand Slam victory faster than any other wrestler in company history ... After months of speculation on how Christian Cage will make his WWE debut, arriving in ECW feels somewhat anti-



With Awesome Kong nursing back and knee injuries, one of her stablemates—Sojourner Bolt, Raisha Saeed, or Rhaka Khan—needs to assert herself as TNA's top female heel, according to Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda. The future of the Knockouts division may depend on it.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

After splitting from his royal family in Ghana, Prince Nana has taken to invading Ring of Honor cards in search of work. ROH owner Cary Silkin says the promotion won't be bullied into rehiring Nana.



Photo by Joe Zanolle

climactic. Granted, the third brand needs some star power—and soon—but even in a feud with Jack Swagger, having Cage target a practically meaningless title on a show that features just 10 regular in-ring performers hardly seems like a prudent use of his skills. Perhaps Vince is saving a more significant role for Petey Williams (whom WWE should snatch up immediately now that he's left TNA).

TNA NOTES ... With Awesome Kong on the shelf nursing a back injury, it will be interesting to see which Knockout steps up and establishes herself as the dominant female villain in TNA. Raisha Saeed, Rhaka Khan, and Sojourner Bolt are all lumped in the same heel faction, Kongtourage, which makes little sense, considering the group's leader, Kong, is out of action. Neither Angelina Love nor Velvet Sky—although they're supremely contemptible—possesses an aura of invincibility in the ring. Perhaps one of TNA's more popular ladies can fill the void with a heel turn. No matter which lady emerges, though, she'd better not get comfortable in that driver's seat. Kong can, and will, assume the top spot in the Knockouts division as soon as she comes back ... I still can't figure out how TNA could stage a pay-per-view event without involving Samoa Joe and/or A.J. Styles. Heading into Against All Odds without arguably its second biggest stars on the show is akin to WWE going into a pay-per-view without Randy Orton and Chris Jericho. It makes no sense to limit Joe's and A.J.'s involvement to a video and promo, respectively. Maybe by Against All Odds TNA meant the show would pull a decent buy rate against all odds.

ROH NOTES ... ROH fans that were worried the promotion's new booking philosophy may not include talent from Japan's Pro Wrestling NOAH promotion, needn't fret, says owner Cary Silkin. In a recent interview with about.com, Silkin said, "We are going to be continuing to see NOAH talent with us in the future. We just had in our last New York show four stars from NOAH. We will be seeing a lot of them this year" ... One NOAH competitor who has already made his presence known in ROH is Bison Smith. At recent shows in Manassas, Virginia, and Edison, New Jersey, Smith stormed the ring during mid-card matches and attacked the participants. Regarding Smith, Silkin issued the following comment, "Bison Smith is a talented competitor with a wealth of international experience. In fact, we've had our eyes on him for some time. However, we have not, and currently do not, have an agreement in place for him to appear in ROH, and as such, his brutal attacks in both Manassas and Edison shocked us all. We've since received an anonymous letter from someone claiming to be his representation, and this

letter indicates we'll be seeing more from Bison. We will have our security staff on full alert at all upcoming events" ... ROH was also subjected to disruptive appearances by former ROH wrestler Prince Nana at shows in Philly and Edison. Both times ROH security escorted Nana from the building. "Prince Nana is a former member of the ROH roster, but has been absent for many months now," Silkin explained. "From what I understand, he's had a falling out with his royal family in Ghana, and is now doing just about anything to earn a living. Trespassing on ROH events will not force us to employ him. His former stable, the Embassy, has been disbanded for some time, and with that, our relationship with Nana ended. We wish him well."

BUZZCUTS ... While I liked *The Wrestler*, especially Mickey Rourke's performance, I was disappointed by two aspects of the movie. First, I expected Rourke to do a lot more actual ring work than he did. We all heard so much about how Rourke trained with Afa Anoa'i for the role, that I expected more mat action. Second, I was left a little cold by the non-ending, ending. Memo to Aronofsky: Don't leave it to me to draw my own conclusions at the end. I spent 10 friggin' bucks to see your movie, finish the job! Luckily, Marissa Tomei was naked often enough to offset the poor "ending." □

ON ASSIGNMENT

ONE THING THAT never fails to amaze me about WWE is how the jerks always seem to get rewarded while the company's true class acts get the shaft.

Smackdown has offered a perfect example of this all-too-frequent trend. Just compare the fortunes of Grade-A jerk Triple-H with the perennially underrated Victoria.

I've never cared for Triple-H when he goes through his juvenile DeGeneration X phases, especially now that he's a 20-year veteran trying to pass himself off as some hip, young kid. It's actually embarrassing to watch him sometimes.

Over the past few weeks, Triple-H's behavior has gone from crass and distasteful to repulsive and misogynistic. It disturbs me that he remains one of the most popular competitors on the Smackdown roster in light of his recent actions.

Several weeks back, Eve Torres was conducting a backstage interview with Triple-H when he openly began gaping at her cleavage, remarking that "they"

look spectacular and asking if he could touch "them." Of course, Triple-H pretended he was referring to Eve's pearl necklace, but it was an obvious double-entendre referring to her breasts. Some might say it was just a case of "boys being boys" (or a DeGenerate being a degenerate). I saw it as one of the most senior wrestlers in the company—one who has family ties to the chairman and the head of the creative team—attempting to humiliate a woman who was trying to do her job. In what sort of Bizarro universe is it acceptable for a man to try to draw attention to a co-worker's breasts and objectify a woman? Considering WWE has recently moved to make its programming more family-friendly, is it really too much to ask for one of the company's top stars not to ogle a woman's breasts on national television and play it off like a hokey joke?

But that little incident pales in comparison to the way Triple-H has treated Smackdown General Manager Vickie Guerrero.

Triple-H recently attempted to lobby Guerrero for a spot in the Royal Rumble. He did this by undressing a Vickie Guerrero action figure and then insulting Guerrero in the crudest terms possible. He made fun of her clothes, saying she bought them at the "big girls store." He mocked her weight and her "child-bearing hips." He said she had a "vacant, I'm-in-over-my-head" look in her eyes. And then he claimed that he had found naked pictures of her on the Internet, eventually displaying censored photos that implied Vickie was nude.

This is one of the top fan favorites in WWE?

Perhaps even more savage than any of his attacks with his sledgehammer (and why in the world is he allowed to carry that thing around anyway?), Triple-H viciously attacked and humiliated a woman simply because—get this—she is slightly overweight.

Vickie is not a professional athlete. She is a mother who



Danny Zuko would have never treated Sandy Olsen like this in *Grease*. Maybe that's why Senior Writer Liz Hunter feels Triple-H needs to cut back his attitude toward the Smackdown GM.

BY LIZ HUNTER ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

overcame a family tragedy to obtain a major role with the world's largest wrestling promotion. Demonize her for her favoritism of Edge or Chavo if you will, but to mock her for having "child-bearing hips" is unacceptable.

It seems to me that Vickie's late husband, whom HHH professes to admire so much, had no problems with Vickie's child-bearing hips. What do you think Eddie would have to say about what Triple-H did to his wife?

And Triple-H really ought to think twice before throwing stones. After all, didn't he previously date Chyna, a woman who didn't exactly meet the traditional feminine ideal? And doesn't his own wife, Stephanie, have the same "child-bearing hips" that caused Internet writers to speculate that WWE cameramen were forbidden to shoot her below the waist earlier this year?

As for her wardrobe, I'm sorry, Hunter, but at least Vickie isn't parading around in a black T-shirt and leather jacket like a *Grease* reject. It's the 21st century, Hunter; buy a button-down for goodness' sake.

In the National Hockey League, Dallas Stars forward Sean Avery was suspended for five games by the league after making a crude and inappropriate comment about another player's girlfriend. As far as I'm concerned, Triple-H's recent actions have been even worse, and he deserves a more severe punishment. And the fans should think twice before cheering him.

Now, on to the class act. On the January 15 edition of Smackdown, Victoria announced her retirement after a loss to Michelle McCool. The timing of the announcement was a bit suspicious, coming right before a wave of releases that included D-Lo Brown, Val Venis, and Bob Holly. There's no way to tell if Victoria's decision to retire was related to the cutbacks the company was making or not. I can tell you, however, that through the past six years, Victoria was one of the most adaptable and entertaining women on the WWE roster.

During her WWE tenure, she won two women's titles and scored wins over the likes of Trish Stratus, Lita, Ivory, Molly Holly, and Mickie James. She was able to portray a lunatic (in her early "hearing voices" incarnation), a sexpot, a sadist, and a comedian (who could forget her Yokozuna or Peanut-Butter-Jelly-Time Halloween



Victoria has been a hard-working, class act since her days in OVW. Hunter feels it is way too often that WWE lets the good ones go, and keeps the bad ones around.

costumes?). She had a real joy for what she did and was a natural entertainer. Along with Trish and Gail Kim, she was also one of the top in-ring women performers of the decade. And, speaking as someone who has known her since her days in OVW, she is a first-rate human being and a true sweetheart. It's a damn shame that her career came to an end with so little fanfare.

I'll tell you this: I'd enjoy wrestling a heck of a lot more if there were more Victorias and fewer Triple-Hs. □

[T H U M B S U P]

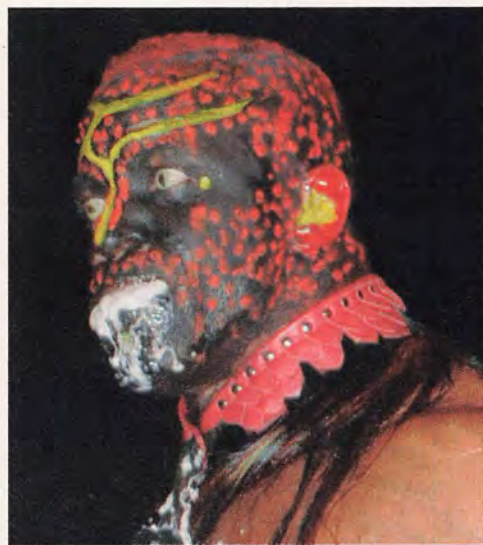
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Thumbs Up to Abyss. Somehow, TNA's resident maniac was able to endure yet another heartbreaking calamity, this time when former tag team partner Matt Morgan attacked him after a recent match. Despite having his fragile ego and tenuous grip on normalcy constantly challenged, Abyss continues to forge ahead. Yes, his idiosyncrasies and quirks must have been difficult for Morgan to endure. But clearly, Abyss is better off without Morgan or anybody else.

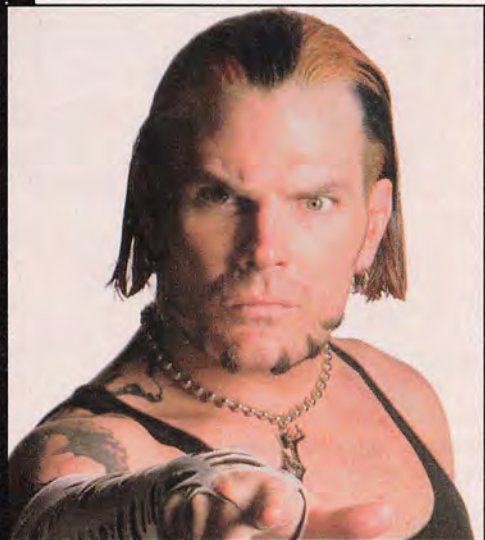
Thumbs Up to The Boogeyman. It's rare that The Boogeyman receives anything other than puzzled looks and the occasional sickened grimace, but any competitor who can work his way back from injury and be just as marketable as he

was prior to it is worthy of some accolades. The eccentric ECW creature went through a slight change of image, which did not include a deviation from his preferred diet of worms. Focusing his attention on the equally creepy Birchall siblings in early-2009 only made Boogey more appealing and worthy of a big "Thumbs Up."



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Thumbs Up to Jeff Hardy. Hard work brought him to the level of world champion, and if Jeff can continue the level of dedication he has shown in recent months, there's no reason to believe he can't remain among the WWE elite for years to come. His WWE championship win at Armageddon in late-2008 propelled the fan favorite to a level of success he had never before experienced in wrestling. A crushing loss at the Royal Rumble, in part to his brother Matt's chair shot, is only a mere setback in what looks to be a great 2009.

Thumbs Up to Alex Shelley. His methods may be questionable, but his talent is as true as it comes in TNA. Shelley captured his first X division championship by defeating his

Motor City Machine Guns teammate Chris Sabin at Genesis in January and seemed poised to defend the gold at all costs. If the old code of the X division was not dead by this point, it was certainly on life support prior to Shelley's reign. Kevin Nash's ultra-talented former protégé's reign may end up being line-one in the code's eulogy.

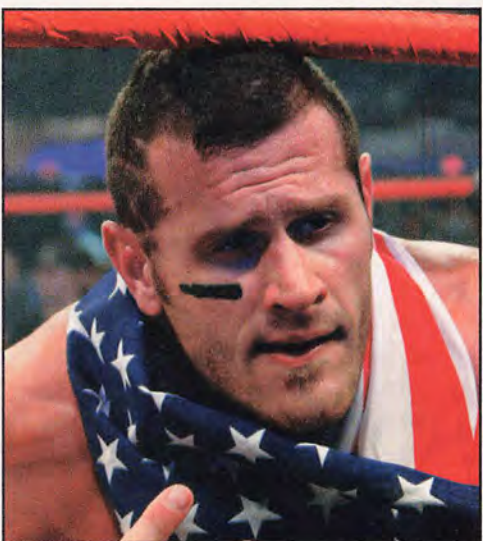


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

[T H U M B S D O W N]



Thumbs Down to Kelly Kelly. Although she's improving in the ring with each passing match, Kelly Kelly earns a "Thumbs Down." That she is getting other wrestlers to incur the wrath of her wayward suitor Kane is just wrong. As if having to deal with the wee-bit-obsessive Kane isn't bad enough, misdirecting him toward attacking men you pretend to be attracted to will not help garner sympathy. Sure, it's great to see guys like The Miz shake at the mere sight of Kane, but something still doesn't seem right. Here's a "Thumbs Down" from every guy who has ever had the stuffing knocked out of him over a woman.

Thumbs Down to Ricky Ortiz. Most guys make a name for themselves through great wrestling, an intriguing persona, and a bit of luck. Ortiz seemed to be enjoying a little

bit of all of those elements. However, a few minor setbacks appear to have derailed the entertaining newcomer. Ortiz' growing frustration with his position in ECW has affected his in-ring performance and given him something of an edge that had been missing from his game. Whether he chooses to use that edge to improve or merely complain remains to be seen. So far, though, the latter looks like the safer bet.



Thumbs Down to Matt Hardy. Apparently, it was all an act. The image of the concerned brother that supported Jeff Hardy through his recent travails went up in smoke at the Royal Rumble when Matt attacked his brother with a chair and caused him to lose the WWE championship to Edge. After months and months of near-misses and disappointment, Jeff finally reached the pinnacle of the sport. And how does his brother congratulate him? With a cowardly chair shot that ended his title reign.

Thumbs Down to Michelle McCool. At first, she seemed like an obvious choice to be the face of the Divas division on Smackdown, and her title reign was entertaining. Unfortunately, somewhere along the

line, McCool developed a serious case of the crazies and turned her back on everything that made her a fan favorite. An unwarranted cockiness resurfaced that appeared to have been long dormant since her days as a sinister educator. Her in-ring work suffered as a result and, soon thereafter, the fans made their displeasure known. Sadly, all the good will and support that McCool garnered was erased in a matter of weeks when she took to attacking her fellow Divas.



Photo by George Napolitano

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P O I N T:

WRESTLERS MUST SHOW RESTRAINT WHEN CONFRONTED BY UNRULY FANS

BY AL ALVEN

WHEN PRESENTED AT its absolute best—and, unfortunately, sometimes its very worst—professional wrestling is an entertainment medium that tickles the raw emotional fibers of its audience. If basic storytelling is an art form, so too is the ability of these performers to draw responses of excitement, sympathy, and, in certain cases, outright anger from the fans.

Most wrestlers have a firm understanding of this. And, unlike the old territorial days, the majority of those who purchase tickets to attend live events do as well. Regardless, a wrestler will occasionally find himself in a situation where a fan crosses the line and initiates physical contact.

At one time, it was perfectly acceptable for a wrestler to fight back against an aggressive fan in any manner he deemed fit. But things have changed. Today, it is important for wrestlers to show as much restraint as possible, for a variety of reasons.

First and foremost, there is the sanctity of the industry's "image." Or, in more local terms, the reputation of the wrestler himself and the company he works for. This is essential, especially in the age of instant information, when word of an incident from a tiny independent in the middle of nowhere can spread through channels and become the talk of the wrestling world in no time.

Whatever the reasoning behind it, physical action by a wrestler against a fan is going to generate negative attention. This is a promoter's nightmare and, regardless of what it says on the back of a ticket stub, an injury lawyer's dream come true.

In most cases, when fans have come in contact with a wrestler, a physical response has not been necessary. Take the incident at the Ring of Honor show in Philadelphia on December 26, when Austin Aries was slapped and pushed by a fan on his way to the back. Aries responded by punching the fan, who probably deserved what he got.

But that didn't make it a smart move on Aries' part. His split-second decision has not yet come back to hurt him or the company, but the fan continues to threaten legal action. It could have been even worse, though. What if the fan had fallen backward and hit his head on the concrete floor? Any number of potentially tragic scenarios could have resulted from Aries' actions.

Responding as Aries did just isn't worth the potential legal and business hassles that could ensue. Let security take care of such matters and be done with it. Why risk so much, especially in a situation like this one, where Aries was in no danger and could have just as easily walked away?

Randy Orton, of all people, displayed one recent example of restraint during a match against John Cena in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in early-January. At one point in the action, Orton jawed with several fans at ringside. One fan in particular became so enraged by Orton's heel antics that he fired a cup of beer at the wrestler as he stood on the turnbuckle.

Orton glared at the fan menacingly, never breaking character, but did not lay a hand on him. He simply motioned to the arena exit, and security soon ejected the perpetrator. The match continued, and Orton actually used the interaction to gain more heat with the audience.

Comparing the two incidents is tricky, because the fan physically touched Aries. Still, Orton's level-headed response ensured that he would not have to be held accountable for any questionable actions later. He may have wanted to haul off and slug the fan, but likely realized that there was little to gain, and much more to potentially lose.

Al Alven is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.

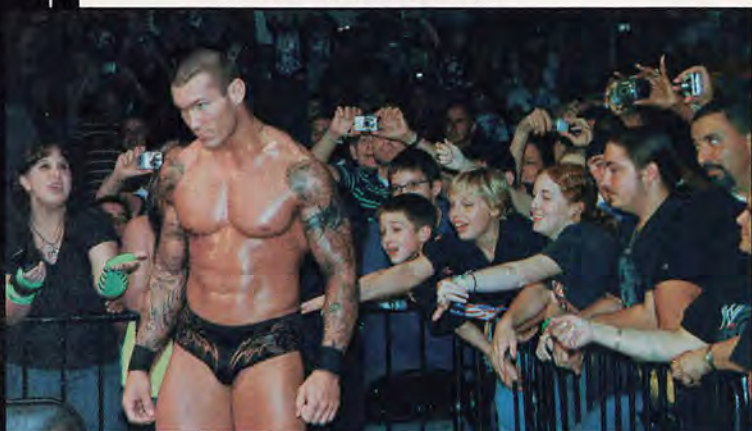


Photo by Duane Long

As explosive and extreme as Randy Orton's temper may be, even he knows responding physically to fan contact is not in his or WWE's best interest. Orton apparently agrees with Contributing Writer Al Alven, who preaches restraint for wrestlers that are physically provoked by fans.

C O U N T E R P O I N T :

WRESTLERS MUST BE ALLOWED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES WHEN NECESSARY

BY BRADY HICKS

WRESTLING FANS LIKE to be part of the show, and that's a good thing. The more "into it" fans are, the more crowd interaction a match or an angle can generate, the better the atmosphere.

But, naturally, there has to be boundaries. Fans can hold up signs that reflect their opinions. They can yell and scream just about anything they want, or can engage in or encourage those around them to participate in chants.

What they can't and should never be allowed to do without consequence is touch a performer. That line has to be drawn and must be respected. Simply put: If a fan initiates contact with a wrestler, he is opening himself up to whatever comes next. If the result is physical retribution from a wrestler exercising the right to defend himself, then so be it.

However, under no circumstance should a wrestler lay a hand on a fan, unless physically attacked.

Unfortunately, though, that does happen from time to time. In those cases, a wrestler's physical safety has to be his top priority. He has to do what he feels is necessary to protect himself at that moment.

In many ways, however, it's about more than a wrestler merely defending himself. As harsh as this may sound, the act of a performer retaliating to an attack by a fan is likely the best deterrent to future incidents. It sets the example: If you lay a hand on one of us, there will be swift, disproportionate, and, most likely, very painful consequences.

Let's take a look at the Austin Aries incident that my colleague Al Alven referenced. Surely, other fans—both those in attendance that night and others who read about the incident—are well aware of what could happen should one decide to physically provoke a wrestler at an ROH event.

As far as the Randy Orton incident goes, we have to remember that Orton works for WWE, which can naturally provide a much more secure setting for its performers. From the high retaining wall that separates the fans from the ringside area to the inflated security presence, WWE talent is at less risk than those exposed to fan behavior in more intimate settings at indy shows, including those run by ROH.

Orton did the right thing. But so did Aries, albeit in a

completely different and much more potentially dangerous manner.

Today's fans are smart enough to understand that the action unfolding before them is pure entertainment. They are able to realize that when Rosa Mendez jumps the barrier on Raw to help Beth Phoenix attack Mickie James, it's all part of the show.

There will always be some fans, however, that feel they have something to prove. Often, as with fans at any sporting event, alcohol plays a part in poor judgment and bad behavior. But alcohol should never provide an excuse for unruly fans to hide behind.

Aside from matters of safety and example setting, there is one other aspect of wrestler self-defense that benefits the sport. It comes right down to protecting the business. Kayfabe may have died a long time ago, but the illusion of competition remains at the core of the trade.

When a fan assaults a wrestler, it is ridiculous to expect, in the context of such a violent art, that the wrestler would just stand there and take it. Of course he is going to fight back, and, of course, he should. If fans have reason to object to that logic, they surely would have a hard time defending somebody's decision to engage the wrestler in the first place.

Brady Hicks is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.

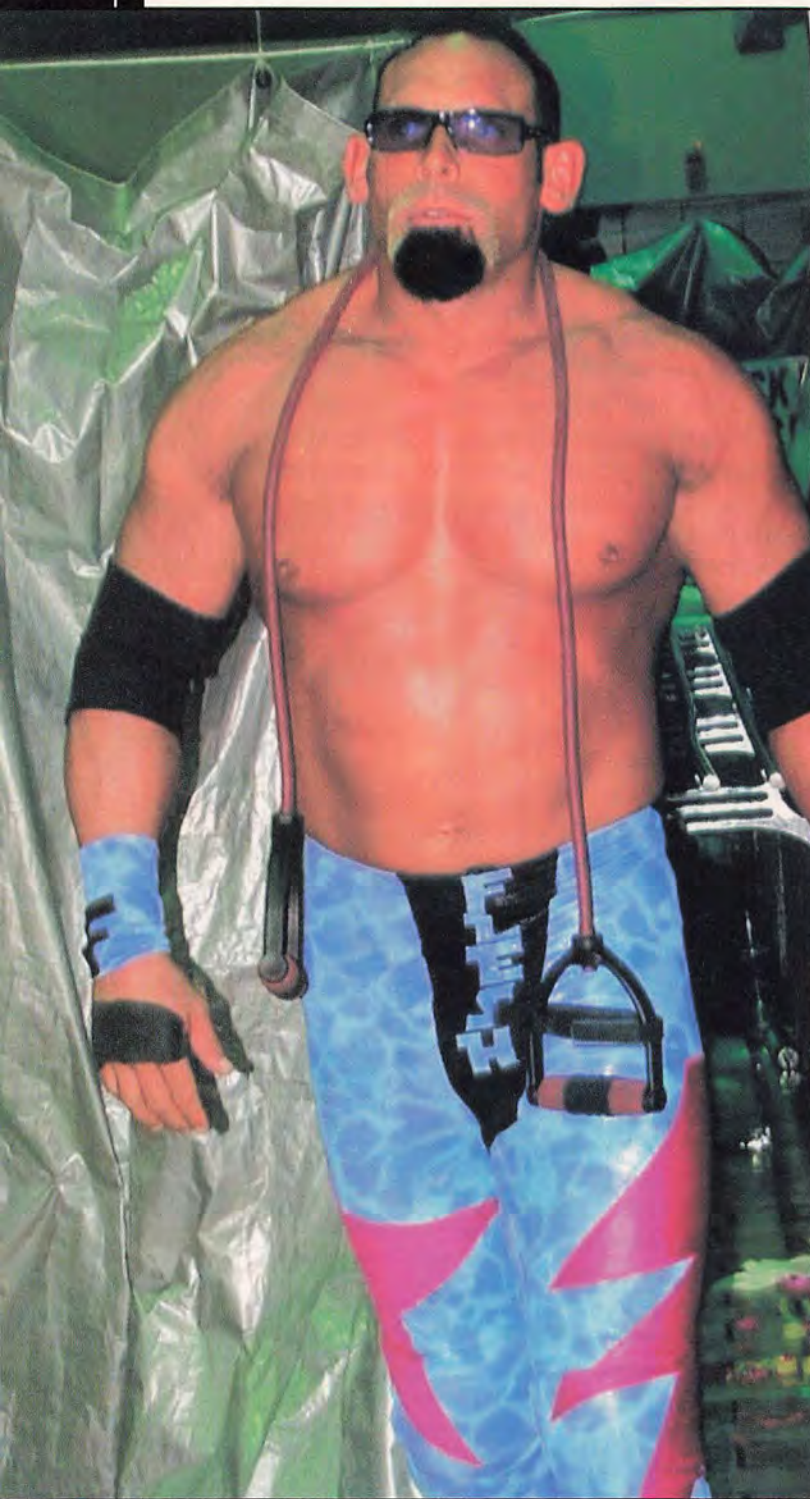


Photo by Joe Zanolle

Austin Aries is always a willing combatant in the ROH ring, and occasionally outside of it as well. Austin decked a fan after being struck as he walked the aisle to the locker room on a recent card. While such encounters are unfortunate, Contributing Writer Brady Hicks feels Aries' response was not only justified, but sets an example fans need to see.

INTRODUCING

PAUL FLESHMAN



AS A YOUNG man, "The Reflection Of Perfection" Paul Fleshman was an enormous fan of competitive bodybuilding that idolized muscular celebrities such as Hulk Hogan and Arnold Schwarzenegger. A little more than 20 years later, "Flesh"—as he is often called—is a bigger fan than ever before ... literally. In fact, years of extensive weight training have given the 6'2", 265-pound Toronto native (turned Venice Beach, California, resident) a profile comparable to Michelangelo's famed statue of David. This analogy appeals to the side of Flesh's personality that once craved being crowned the next "Mr. Olympia."

The difference is that these days he would rather be compared to Billy Graham, Jesse Ventura, or Scott Steiner than bodybuilding legends Schwarzenegger, Lee Haney, or Dorian Yates.

Flesh has what he believes is the perfect combination of size and skill necessary to get ahead in the wrestling ring. When he first began formally training to wrestle in the late-1990s, he assumed he would easily take to it because of his size. Ironically, just one day of wrestling school changed this mindset.

"We had an incredibly intense class," recalled Flesh, a graduate of Sweet Daddy Siki and Ron Hutchinson's wrestling school in Toronto, a facility that has produced talents such as Edge, Christian Cage, Trish Stratus, and Gail Kim. "We would run football fields six, sometimes even seven times, then run up and down flights of stairs for a week straight. The following week we were taking hip-tosses onto the hard, wooden floor of the training facility. We also did thousands of Hindu squats. I think it was like six weeks before we even got to step into the hard, stiff boxing ring to run the ropes. I was out of breath literally every day."

Flesh immediately found himself overwhelmed with the amount of cardiovascular training needed just to be a wrestler. Until that point, his regimen consisted largely of many hours each day spent at the gym and eating properly. "Obviously, what set Paul apart from most all other indy wrestlers at the time was his massively muscled physique," said Hutchinson, who was responsible for most of Flesh's training. "He definitely looked like a guy who could inflict a lot of damage if you got him mad. There were just some other areas that needed some more work."

BY BRADY HICKS ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Flesh credits the intense training he received in the ring with all the success he has achieved over the years. Since the time of his first match (against fellow classmate, WWE's Kizarny) in Toronto in June 2000, he has learned many difficult lessons in the wrestling business. "I found out very early on that things don't come easier just because you're bigger. Wrestling is a tough business," said Flesh. "It is more than a little hard on the body. You're constantly moving. You go out and beat yourself up for 15, sometimes 20 minutes or more, and then you're heading out to go on the next tour. And it doesn't matter whether the show draws 50 people, 500 people, or more than a thousand. Each town has its own following and paid to see you wrestle. You have to step it up no matter where you are."

For this reason, Flesh takes a lot of pride in his technical abilities as a wrestler. Much more than a stereotypical lumbering giant, the shining star of his repertoire is his FKO finisher, a move similar to Brock Lesnar's F5 that ends with a Steve Austin-esque stunner. The other moves that Flesh performs depend on the size and technical ability of his opponent. "Because of my size, I usually am the more powerful guy in the ring," he said. "Sometimes I like to catch a smaller guy off-guard with some of the moves I can perform. I also enjoy the times when I get to wrestle a bigger guy because it takes me more out of my comfort zone and forces me to try other things besides power moves. I definitely appreciate it the few times I have the chance to be the smaller guy."

Over the years, Flesh also developed a bit of a personality. The self-professed living incarnation of "twisted steel and sex appeal, sliced and diced, jacked and packed" has appeared in more than 25 commercials, starred on *The Greatest Canadian* television series, and begun offering personal training services on the side.

"I feel like each thing I do can only help contribute to my success," said Flesh. "If it makes me better in any way, even just helping bring me a little bit more out of my shell, then it was worth the time spent in the long run."



It isn't often Fleshman gets a chance to match up with someone equal in strength, like Chris Masters. But when he does, he says it takes him out of his element, something he enjoys a lot.

A regular contributor to the Toronto wrestling scene, Flesh's willingness to try his hand at new ventures has paid off with stints and championships in many promotions, including WWE's old Deep South territory, New Vision, BSE Pro, and Twin Wrestling Entertainment. Flesh is also currently known as the teammate of "the world's greatest trainer and America's next top model," Vlad the Penetrator, with whom—alongside manager Roxxy—he has been "breaking necks and cashing checks" for years.

"Even though I'll probably never make it to WWE, I consider my time spent involved in wrestling to be very successful," concluded Flesh. "I love competing throughout my home country and bringing honor to it, and I've also had the opportunity to compete against many different stars over time, including Jim Neidhart, Kurrgan, Greg Valentine, Robert Roode, The Honky Tonk Man, and Jim Duggan. And I got to overpower them all."

"Even if all this went away tomorrow, at least I can say I've gotten to live the dream." □

WORKING

BY AL CASTLE

WINNERS AND LOSERS AREN'T THE REAL MEMORIES

Much is made around this time each year about "WrestleMania moments"—those little pieces of history from wrestling's annual biggest event that are cherished by generations of fans.

Hulk Hogan slamming Andre the Giant before 93,000 fans. Shawn Michaels entering the ring at the Arrowhead Pond in Anaheim, California, on a zip wire. Vince McMahon getting his head shaved by Donald Trump.

Although some take away just the winners and losers of each card, Contributing Writer Al Castle remembers the stories of his life that go with each event. The British Bulldogs' victory over the Dream Team put both Al and his brother in an uproar when they heard about it over WWF's telephone hotline.



But not all WrestleMania moments are caught on tape. Each of us has our own unique memories from our individual experiences of each show—memories that can make us hold dear even the weakest of WrestleMania cards.

The collective wrestling world may remember WrestleMania II for being held in three cities, for its battle royal featuring NFL players, or for its steel cage main event between Hulk Hogan and King Kong Bundy. I remember it as the night when my brother and I, in lieu of having access to pay-per-view or closed-circuit television, huddled around a rotary phone receiver for periodic updates from the show on WWE's "976" hotline. We exploded in cheers when we heard The British Bulldogs won the WWF World tag team championship from Greg Valentine and Brutus Beefcake.

WrestleMania III was the year we drove to the Nassau Coliseum in New York to watch the event on a giant screen. When Ricky Steamboat small-packaged Randy Savage for the pin, the arena was so loud you would have thought we were in the Pontiac Silverdome.

In 1994, my dream came true when my dad took me to my first WrestleMania at Madison Square Garden. I was heartbroken when my favorite wrestler at the time, Lex Luger, was disqualified in his World title match against Yokozuna. But experiencing the historic ladder match between Michaels and Razor Ramon brought a smile back to my face.

And in 2002, I made my first WrestleMania pilgrimage when my wife and I packed some bags, and a thermos full of coffee, and left in the pre-dawn hours for a nine-hour drive to Toronto to see WrestleMania X8.

It is those WrestleMania memories that I cherish more than any match result or ring entrance. And, as a new father, I look forward to creating many more WrestleMania memories with my son—starting in Houston, Texas.

SOMETIMES IT'S BEST TO JUST STAY RETIRED

There are the WrestleMania moments that were, and then there are the WrestleMania moments that should have been—instances that should have been remembered as something special, but for a variety of reasons fell flat.

Chief among them may have been Mick Foley's retirement match at WrestleMania 2000. You know, the one that came three weeks after his far more memorable retirement match at that year's No Way Out.

.....

Foley's participation in the night's main event—a fatal four-way elimination match—was entirely forgettable, and so Foley's amazing career appeared destined to end in a whimper instead of a bang.

Six years later, Foley got the opportunity to have a suitable end to his big-match career when he took on Edge in a memorable hardcore match at WrestleMania 22. If we never saw Foley wrestle again, our last image would be of the "Hardcore Legend" going out in a blaze of glory.

But instead, Foley has made a number of "one-night-only" returns over the past several years—the most recent of which came in a six-man tag team match at TNA's Genesis pay-per-view. In the few minutes of action that he saw in the ring, Foley appeared broken-down and out of shape—just like he did nine years earlier at WrestleMania 2000.

None of this is meant as a slight on Foley, whose career was legendary. But it is meant to make the point that when an opportunity presents itself for a wrestler to end his career on the highest of high notes at WrestleMania, it is certainly worth strong consideration. Just ask Ric Flair.

NOW IT'S ALL CLEAR WHY THEY ARE GONE

If there was one WrestleMania moment that sticks out in my head above all others, it was The Ultimate Warrior celebrating his "Ultimate Challenge" victory over Hulk Hogan amid a storm of fireworks at the Toronto SkyDome. After taking a break from wrestling for about a year, it was the Warrior's win that brought me back to the sport.

So stirred was I by the Warrior's victory that I ran out and purchased the August 1990 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, featuring the Warrior's historic celebration on the cover.

Having not read *PWI* in a while, I remember being surprised by something I found inside—that the AWA was still around.

In the mid-1980s, I was a fan of the AWA, and vividly recall playing with my Road Warriors action figures in my toy AWA ring, and being outraged when Stan Hansen beat one of my heroes, Rick Martel, for the AWA World championship.

But the AWA I read about in the pages of *PWI* in 1990 was a far cry from the one I remembered. The rankings page showed names like D.J. Peterson, Tommy Jammer, and The Trooper, and a feature story discussed Larry



The August 1990 issue of *PWI*—which featured The Ultimate Warrior in all his championship glory on the cover—drew Castle in for the purchase. But it was his morbid fascination with the dying AWA that he recalls to this day.

Zbyszko winning the vacant AWA title in a tournament. *Is he still around?* I wondered.

Not surprisingly, about a year later the AWA closed its doors for good. For years, I heard the stories about how the once-influential wrestling company struggled in its closing years. And, if only for the same reason that drivers slow down as they pass a wreck on the side of the road, I always wished I could have been witness to AWA's dark days.

Now, thanks to ESPN Classic, my wishes have been granted. The cable network, which was AWA's home during the promotion's downward spiral, has dusted off its tape collection to let fans relive the final days of the promotion.

Among the "stars" featured in the first episode I caught were The Texas Hangmen, The Russian Brute, and the "Timekeeper" Mike George. They wrestled in a two-thirds-empty arena on a show with production values that would make a Ring of Honor DVD look like WrestleMania on Blu-Ray.

And in one hour, I gained a better understanding of why the AWA went out of business than I ever had in more than 20 years. □

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

BOOKER T

BOOKER HUFFMAN WAS born the youngest of eight children ... Grew up on the tough streets of Houston, Texas ... Raised by older brother Lane ... Two would end up working together a few years later ... Active in athletics as a teenager ... Unfortunately, also active in less-than-legal outside activities ... Served 19 months in prison after being convicted of armed robbery at a Wendy's restaurant ... Without direction, and with a family to feed, entered Ivan Putski's wrestling school at big brother Lane's suggestion ... Trained under Scott Casey ... Developed an attitude and ring style that was unique to the Texas independent scene ... Debuted with Western Wrestling Alliance ... Went by the name G.I. Bro ... Left WWA and toured the Texas independent circuit ... Began teaming with Lane, now known as Stevie Ray ... Dropped the G.I. Bro persona in favor of Booker T (Tio is his middle name) ... Went to work for Skandor Akbar's

Global Wrestling Federation ... Duo renamed The Ebony Experience ... Held the GWF tag team title three times ... Left GWF for the bigger stage of World Championship Wrestling ... Made first appearance with WCW in August 1993 as Harlem Heat ... Briefly changed names to Kole and Kane ... Back to Booker T and Stevie Ray by 1994 ... Added Sherri Martel as manager ... Sherri was the perfect complement ... Captured first of a record 10 WCW World tag team championships in same year ... Added Colonel Parker to the fold ... Feuded with various teams throughout the mid-'90s ... Slipped and used a racial slur in reference to Hulk Hogan on live television ... Dumped Parker in 1997 ... Soon followed by giving Sherri the boot ... Went through an unusual championship dry spell ... Added Jacqueline as manager for a brief period before she left for the WWF ... Stevie Ray was injured leaving Booker on his own for the first extended period ... Captured first TV title in 1997 by defeating Disco Inferno ... Defended against the likes of Rick Martel and Perry Saturn ... Was beaten for the title by Fit Finlay in 1998 due to Chris Benoit's interference ... Won epic best-of-seven series with Chris Benoit, 4-3, for the right to challenge Finlay for the TV title ... Paired up again with brother Stevie Ray in 1999 ... Big brother had joined the NWO briefly ... Added the musclebound Midnight as new manager ... Reunion did not last long ... Stevie Ray turned against the team ... Feuded for much of the next year ... Lost the T from name as a match stipulation ... Returned to the G.I. Bro gimmick in late-2000 ... Feuded with The New Blood faction headed by Vince Russo and Eric Bischoff ... It was, mercifully, short-lived ... Defeated Jeff Jarrett at Bash at the Beach to capture the World title ... First of infamous "five times" World championship runs ... Captured the U.S. championship from Rick Steiner following return from injury ... Further disappointed the extended Steiner family when he regained the WCW World title from Scott Steiner on the final episode of *Nitro* ... Was reigning U.S. and World champion when WCW was purchased by the WWF ... Holds record for most titles won and held in WCW history ... Signed a contract with the WWF in 2001 ... First appearance was a run-in at the King of the Ring pay-per-view ... Joined the ill-fated Alliance faction ... Continued to defend the WCW World title as part of the WWF roster ... Surrendered the U.S. title before feuding with both Kurt Angle and The Rock over the World strap ... Would eventually lose the title to both men ... Held



January 1994: Drop the names "Kane" and "Kole" and switch back to their original Booker T and Stevie Ray. Harlem Heat would go on to add Sister Sherri to the mix and begin an impressive streak of tag team dominance never before seen in WCW.



BOOKER T

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



December 1997: Booker T, after losing partner Stevie Ray to injury, goes on to challenge and beat Disco Inferno for his first ever singles title. The WCW TV title reign would be the first step in Booker's storied singles career.



June 1998: After a great best-of-seven series with Chris Benoit goes to match seven, Booker clamps down and ends the epic series in dramatic fashion, beating "The Crippler" (left) at Great American Bash and then ending the night by beating Fit Finlay (below) for the TV title.



both the WCW and WWF World tag title with Test in the interim ... Briefly teamed with Mr. McMahon in his ongoing battle with Steve Austin ... Came up short in yet another feud ... Popular member of the roster with little luck in the big matches ... Won WrestleMania debut against Edge, earning the right to appear in a Japanese shampoo commercial ... Moved to the Raw brand ... Suddenly became a player in the hardcore championship picture ... Won the gold twice ... Not fit for the demands of hardcore division ... Joined a brief reincarnation of the NWO ... Also, did not last long ... Began partnering with Goldust against his own reservations ... The duo captured the WWE World tag title from Christian and Chris Jericho before being beaten by William Regal and Lance Storm and parting amicably ... Concentrated efforts on the WWE World championship ... Earned a World title shot against Triple-H at WrestleMania XIX ... Failed to pull off the upset ... Won first Intercontinental title from Christian in July 2003... Lost it back to Christian a month later due to injury ... Returned from injury to enjoy a brief WWE World tag team title run with Rob Van Dam ... Traded to Smackdown against wishes ... Turned on the ego big time on Friday nights ... Feuded, unsuccessfully, with The Undertaker ... Shifted focus toward yet another championship, the U.S. title, in 2004 ... Won the gold in an eight-man elimination

match ... Lost it back to former champion John Cena in a best-of-five series ... Did not rival prior series with Benoit in WCW ... Focused on the WWE championship once again... Cutting corners and breaking rules did not help situation ... Still could not win the gold ... Entered a bizarre and uncomfortable feud with Kurt Angle ... Wife Sharmell was being stalked by the former Olympian ... Paired up with former rival Benoit ... Sharmell interfered with the team chemistry and Smackdown GM Teddy Long ordered them to reprise their best-of-seven series to settle matters ... With Sharmell's assistance, Booker won the first three matches, but went down with a groin injury after losing the fourth match ... Fill-in Randy Orton won the deciding match and handed over the belt to Booker ... Lost the title to John Cena ... Feuded briefly with The Boogeyman and the two had forgettable match at WrestleMania 22 ... Began ascent to the top after that ... Captured both the King of the Ring and World heavyweight championships in the same calendar year, 2006 ... Took on the persona of royalty, complete with British accent ... Lost the title to Batista at Survivor Series 2006 ... Competed in "Money In The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania 23 won by Ken Kennedy ... Drafted back to Raw ... Challenged both Triple-H and



November 1999: Former female bodybuilder Midnight joins with Stevie Ray and Booker T. This doesn't sit well with Stevie Ray who sends a beatdown in the direction of both Midnight and Booker, starting a brotherly feud that would spill over into the next millennium.



May 2000: After being left for dead by big brother Stevie Ray, Booker joins the Misfits In Action and changes his name back to his old WWA moniker, G.I. Bro. Fortunately that role only lasted one pay-per-view match before Booker went back to his better known name.



March 2001: On the final episode of *Monday Nitro*, Booker T pounds Scott Steiner until he comes away with his fifth and final WCW World championship. Booker would take the WCW title with him to WWE when he made the move after the closing of WCW for good.



July 2003: King Booker, as he is now referred to, takes 2003 by storm. After winning the King of the Ring earlier in the year, he goes from Rey Mysterio Jr on to capture his first WWE World title at The Great American Bash.

Jerry Lawler over use of nickname "King" ... Wasn't successful on either front ... Left WWE in 2007 in a cloud of controversy over connection to a pharmaceutical company ... Final match was a disqualification loss to John Cena ... Debuted with TNA in November 2007 ... Paired with Sting at Genesis ... Initial feud was with Robert Roode but also involved Sharmell and Peyton Banks ... Turned against fellow fan favorites Christian Cage and Rhino ... Much better when hated than loved ... Chased down then-TNA World champion Samoa Joe ... Could not capture the gold, so he stole it ... British accent somehow snuck back into the picture briefly ... Held on to the strap until Joe forcibly took it back ... Began carrying a briefcase around with undisclosed contents ... Revealed to be a title belt ... Declared himself the first TNA Legends champion in October 2008

... No competition for the title ... Held the gold as a member of the Main Event Mafia faction ... Defeated Cage in his final match with TNA ... Wrestled against Mick Foley in his debut match with TNA in a six-man tag match at Genesis 2009 ... Part of the Mafia's NWO-style takeover of *Impact* in January 2009 ... Provided color commentary with Kevin Nash ... Referred to himself as "Black Snow" throughout the broadcast ... Owner of Houston-based Pro Wrestling Alliance independent and Pro Wrestling Academy training site ... Founder of Booker T Fights for Kids, a non-profit organization dedicated with helping underprivileged children in the Houston area. □



July 2008: Trying to earn Samoa Joe's TNA World title, Booker T fails yet again. This time, however, instead of earning the belt, he decided to just steal it and hold it for ransom until Joe would face him again. Luckily, Booker got what he wanted. Unfortunately, he lost.



October 2008: Instead of winning an established title, Booker decides to declare himself the owner of a new one. When he finally revealed that the contents of his briefcase were the new TNA Legends championship belt and that he was the champion, some of TNA's top stars, like Christian Cage, were not happy at all.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Q & A

JIMMY VALIANT

"There's more than one bounty on my head"

FOR ELVIS PRESLEY fans, there's black-leather Elvis and white-jumpsuit Elvis. Indeed, many versatile performers have found that re-invention is the key to longevity. That was true of the once-arrogant "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant, whose transformation into the happy-go-lucky "Boogie Woogie Man" added 20 years to his career.

James Fanning was a part-time instructor at a health club in Illinois in the early-1960s. The club's owner, Frank Zela (known to wrestling fans as Boris Volkoff), took notice of the youngster's physique, long hair, and charisma. Zela made a unique offer: He would allow Fanning to manage his health club if he agreed to become a wrestler.

Fanning wrestled as Jimmy Valentine in Chicago and Indianapolis, Big Jim Valen in Detroit, Jimmy "The Body" Valen in Minneapolis, and Big Jim McDonald in Nashville. In 1969, Dallas promoter Fritz Von Erich thought of another name: Jimmy Valiant.

The following year, Von Erich recommended Valiant to Vincent J. McMahon. Valiant started in the WWWF as a fan favorite, but he turned against the beloved Chief Jay Strongbow and embarked on a highly successful run as a heel. "Handsome" Jimmy returned to the WWWF in 1974 with his storyline brother, "Luscious" Johnny, and manager Capt. Lou Albano for a monster run as the federation's tag team champions.

The Valiant Brothers captured one regional tag title after another in the mid-1970s. They returned to take another bite of the Big Apple in 1978, but a life-threatening bout with hepatitis forced Jimmy to the sidelines. Yet another brother, "Gentleman" Jerry Valiant (Canadian wrestler John Hill), was introduced in Jimmy's absence. Despite dropping to a frightening 137 pounds, he made an amazing comeback within three months.

At the end of 1979, Johnny and Jerry went to Japan and Jimmy headed for Memphis, where the second phase of his career began.

After a feud with Jerry Lawler, "Handsome" Jimmy was hearing cheers. The evolution became complete in the Mid-Atlantic, where he grew a long beard and began calling himself the "Boogie Woogie Man." In Jim

Crockett Promotions, Valiant battled heel managers Sir Oliver Humperdink and Gary Hart. His years-long feud with Paul Jones' Army is legendary.

Today, Jimmy and his wife, Angel, own Boogie's Wrestling Camp in Shawsville, Virginia. Autographed copies of his 2005 memoirs, *Woo Mercy ... Daddy! Welcome To My World: The Jimmy Valiant Story*, are available at his website, jimmyvaliant.com.

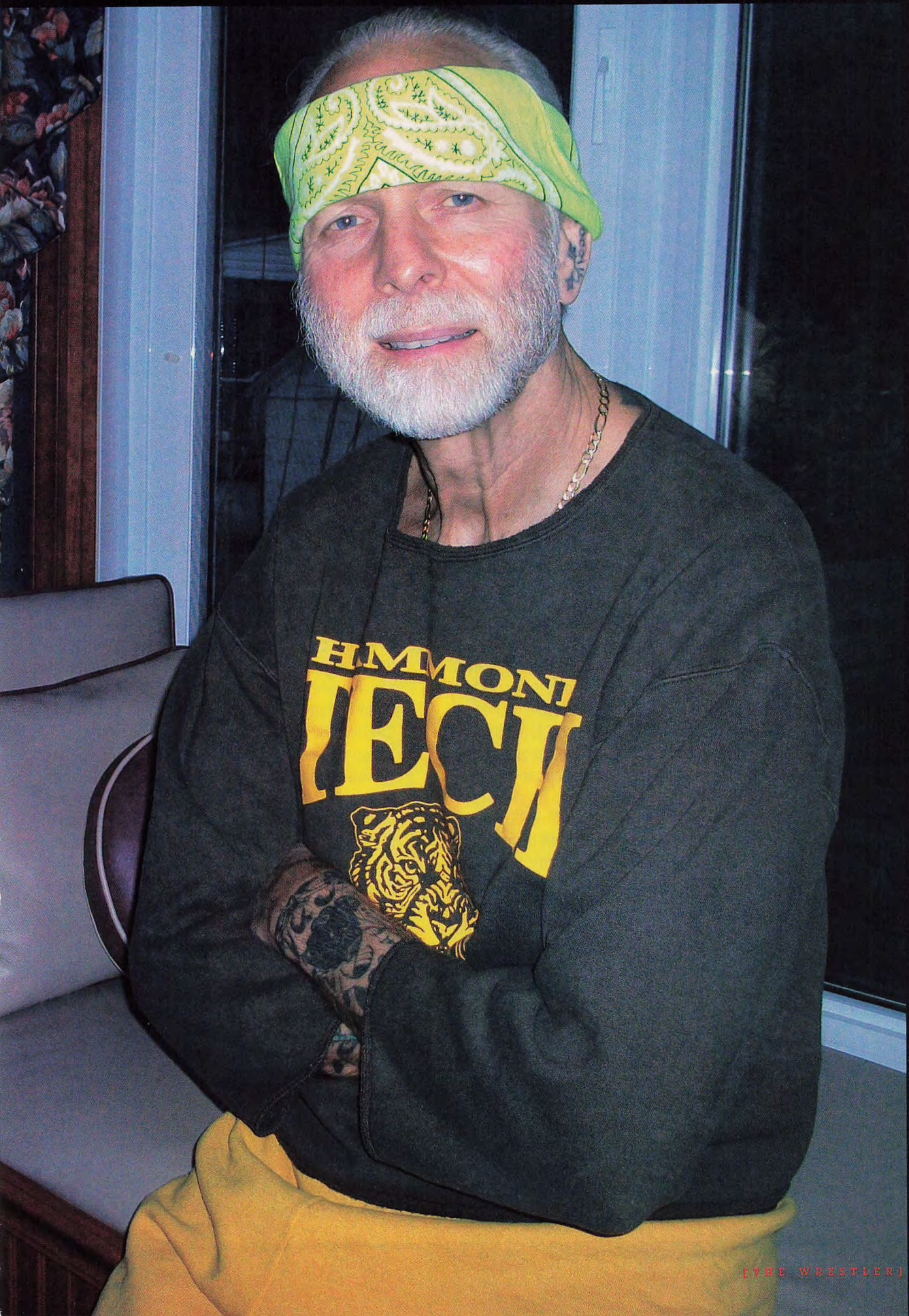
"I admit to being a card-carrying member of Boogie Woogie's Brigade in the 1980s, but I don't think that compromises my journalistic ethics," stated Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who conducted the 90-minute interview with the WWE Hall of Famer. "He's everything fans would expect. Jimmy is high on life—and 100 percent authentic. I would also like to thank Wes Daniels, executive director of the Cauliflower Alley Club (caulifloweralleyclub.org), for his help in contacting Valiant.

Q: Most people in the business are familiar with your training school, Boogie's Wrestling Camp. Some fans learned about your school through the documentary *Live For Sunday*. How busy does Boogie's Wrestling Camp keep you?

A: My wife, Angel, and I started Boogie's Wrestling Camp 18 years ago. For people who want to see what we're all about, BWC is open on Sundays from 12 to 4 p.m., 52 weeks per year. Not only do I want to give back to all my students, but also to my wrestling fans around the world. I have a two-acre compound here in Shawsville, Virginia. Fans have full access to all our buildings, including Boogie's Wrestling Camp Hall of Fame Museum. They get to see the dressing room and my own private office with thousands of pictures on the wall. Fans get to see the kids train and do drills from noon to 2:00, then we take a break, and we come back with matches until 4:00.

Q: How many students, on average, graduate per year?

A: For the past four or five years, we've had an average of about 20 graduated students. We had our 17th annual graduation ceremony this past November, and we handed out diplomas to them.



Interview Photos by Angel Valiant

[THE WRESTLER]



Long before he became the "Boogie Woogie Man," Valiant competed as "Big" Jim Valen in the Detroit territory for The Sheik.

We also give out a handful of honorary degrees to people who've meant a lot to me. Gorilla Monsoon and Dick the Bruiser are honorary members of BWC. We teach old school and new school, the aspects of wrestling that are in danger of becoming a lost art, and also what's current in WWE and TNA. We have a spot for everybody. If your dream is to get involved in the business, then we make it happen for you.

Q: What do you think surprises students the most when they first meet you in person?

A: Many are nervous, but Angel and I put them right at ease. We're all family, helping each other, and no one is trying to do any physical or mental harm to you. We have signs throughout the main camp building and museum: "Have Yourself A Great Life," "Make Your Dream Come True—Only You Can Make It Happen," and "Believe, Succeed, Achieve." My favorite is "If You See Someone Without A Smile, Give Them Yours." This place gives off such positive vibes.

Q: Are you able to relate to these kids who finally get to meet their childhood hero? Did you have a connection to wrestling before you broke into it?

A: I was a grappler from the time I was six years old. I was born in Tennessee and we moved to Indiana when I was three years old because my father needed to find work. I was raised in Hammond, Indiana, 30 minutes from The Loop of Chicago, right off Lake Michigan. So I'm both a southerner and a Yankee.

Q: How did you discover wrestling?

A: When I was six years old, I loved to wrestle the neighbors' kid down in the basement. There was no wrestling program at my school, so I wrestled at the YMCA and different clubs. I began working out with weights when I was 18, and I forgot about wrestling. Then I began managing a health club in Calumet City, Illinois, just across the border from Hammond, Indiana. The owner was Frank Zela, known as Boris Volkoff of The Volkoff Brothers. His partner was the original Nikolai Volkoff, not the one who was famous in the '70s and '80s. Frank said, "Jimmy, you ought to do this because you're big, you're good-looking, you've got nice hair, and a great body. I'll train you." I started wrestling when I was 21 and I haven't had another job since.

Q: Didn't you originally go by the name Jim Valen? Is that your real name?

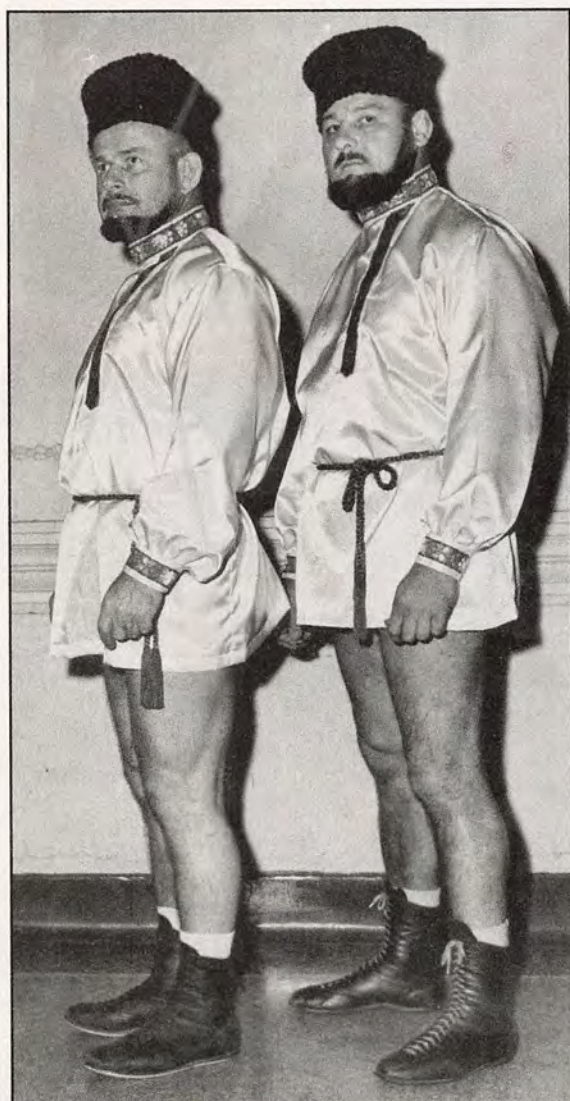
A: A lot of people think that, but no. Frank Zela gave me the name of Jimmy Valentine. I used that during my first few months of wrestling around Chicago. Volkoff introduced me to Dick the Bruiser and Wilbur Snyder, who both ran the WWA. Bruiser let me use the Jimmy Valentine name, but then they sent me to The Sheik in Detroit, where he called me "Big" Jim Valen. Verne Gagne called me Jimmy "The Body" Valen because I was a bodybuilder.

Q: So you were the first "Body"?

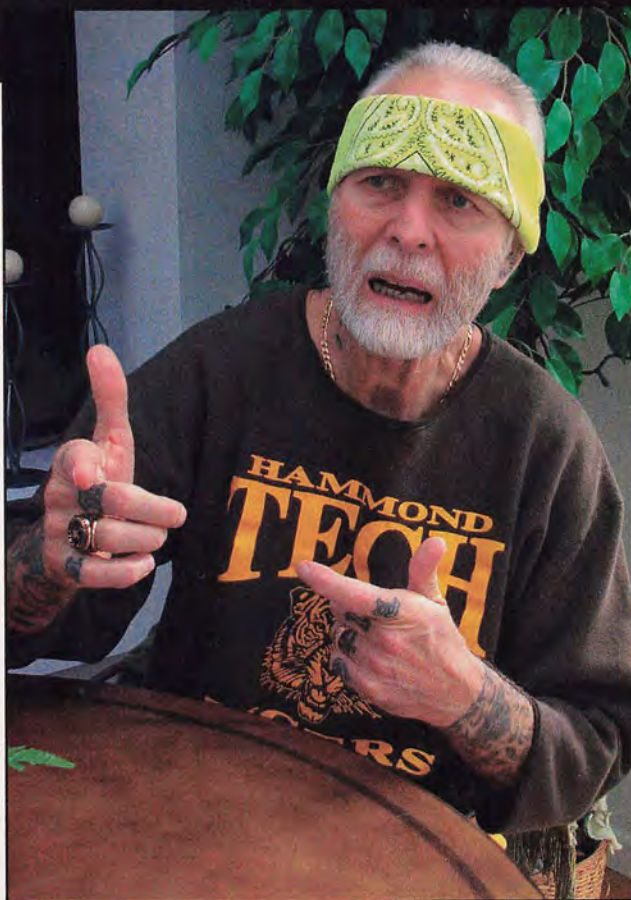
A: Yes, the first "Body," before Jesse Ventura. I also wrestled under that name when Verne Gagne sent

"I got on a plane for New York back in 1970 as 'Handsome' Jimmy Valiant, and getting in the WWWF turned out to be my big break."

me to Oklahoma and when I wrestled for Sam Muchnick in St. Louis. Verne sent me to Texas in 1969. Fritz Von Erich told me that Jimmy Valen was too close to the name of his big star, Johnny Valentine. He sat there, and, in less than two minutes, told me that my name was going to be "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant. Three months later, Vince McMahon Sr. called, looking for a young, good-looking kid. Fritz told Vince, "I've got a kid who



Valiant credits Boris Volkoff (right) with steering him into professional wrestling. Valiant worked at Volkoff's health club when the veteran persuaded Jimmy to give the wrestling business a shot.



just came in. He's just what you're wantin'." I got on a plane for New York back in 1970 as "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant, and getting in the WWWF turned out to be my big break.

Q: You came into the WWWF and began teaming with Chief Jay Strongbow. How'd that come about on TV?

A: When I got to New York, Vince took me into his office and showed me the first six weeks of bookings. And, Harry, I see the first match, I'm against The Black Demon. I asked Vince, "Is this a good guy or bad guy?" I was used to being a bad guy. Vince said, "You'll be a crowd-pleaser, this is what we want." Dead silence. Vince continued, "If you get over in the next six months, and we'll help get you over as a crowd-pleaser, then we'll switch you heel and make you a lot of money." He teamed me with Chief Jay Strongbow for those six months, and we went after the WWWF World tag team champions, Tarzan Tyler and "Crazy" Luke Graham. I turned on the Chief after exactly six months, and ended up beating him with his own hold, the Indian sleeper, which he had taught me. That got me over as a bad guy, man. So I was "Big" Jim Valiant for the first six months, then became "Gentleman" Jim Valiant shortly after turning heel, and then became "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant when they put me with The Grand Wizard, Ernie Roth. I went around the loop with Pedro Morales, who had just won the belt.

Q: All three of the managers in the WWWF at that time were such great talkers. You had The Grand Wizard. Did you learn anything from him? Did he at least give you some fashion tips?

A: I met him in the late-'60s in Detroit when he was known as Abdullah Farouk and managing The Sheik. He took me under his wing in the WWWF and teamed me with one of his wrestlers from Detroit, "Beautiful"

Bobby Harmon. He had such knowledge of our business. He was a mentor to me, like Dick the Bruiser and Boris Volkoff. Even in the '80s when I was a veteran in the Mid-Atlantic, Johnny Weaver became a mentor. I'm still learning today, my man.

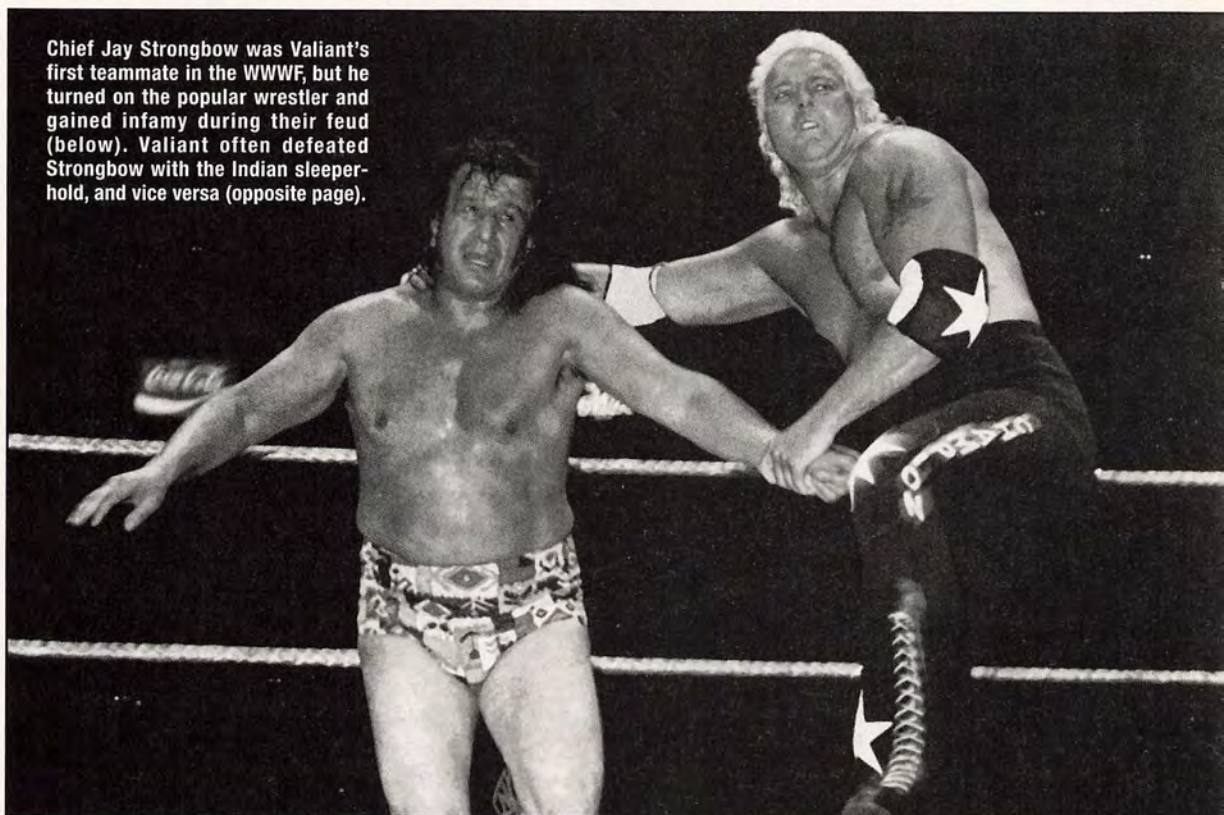
Q: How did The Valiant Brothers come about?

A: In 1972, I came back to the WWA in Indianapolis to work for Bruiser again. "Pretty Boy" Bobby Heenan



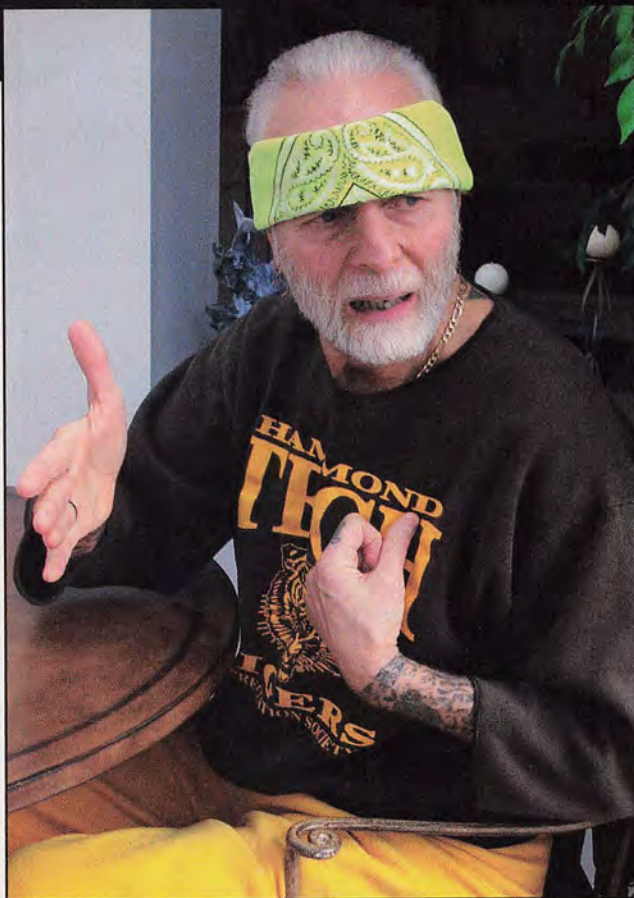
In W.W.A., Jimmy and Johnny Valiant worked with Bobby Heenan (left). In WWWF, Valiant had Abdul Farouk (a.k.a. The Grand Wizard) in his corner. Valiant considers both Heenan and Farouk (right) to be mentors.

Chief Jay Strongbow was Valiant's first teammate in the WWWF, but he turned on the popular wrestler and gained infamy during their feud (below). Valiant often defeated Strongbow with the Indian sleeperhold, and vice versa (opposite page).



“‘Handsome’ Jimmy and ‘Luscious’ Johnny had a five-year run all over the world: Indianapolis, the WWWF, Japan, Atlanta, ‘Frisco, and the AWA—we won belts everywhere.”

was having a great year, managing Baron Von Raschke, Ernie Ladd, and me. Ivan Koloff came in and out. The good guys were Pepper Gomez, Bob Ellis, Wilbur Snyder, Moose Cholak, and Paul Christy. The only problem was that Heenan wanted to go to the AWA. Bruiser said he would have to replace himself with another top heel. Back then, Bobby, Baron Von Raschke, and I would go into London, Ontario, once a month to work for “Bearman” Dave McKigney on Sunday afternoons. Bobby said, “Do you remember that good-lookin’ blond kid with the good body who wrestles at the Sunday afternoon shows?” He wrestled as John L. Sullivan. Bobby said he could be my partner. He mentioned that to Bruiser, and it turned out that Bruno Sammartino helped Johnny get his start, and Bruno would be willing to come in for shots in Indianapolis. So it became a win-win for everybody. Bobby and I talked about my brother, “Luscious”



Johnny, for five weeks before the next big show at the Expo in Indianapolis. I told the people, “There’s no difference between us Valiant Brothers. Hey, I’m not luscious, I’m just handsome. And he’s not handsome, he’s just luscious.” Johnny was so hot walking down the aisle with Bobby and me because we had built him up so high. We took the WWW tag team straps from Pepper Gomez and Wilbur Snyder that night, and The Valiant Brothers were born. “Handsome” Jimmy and “Luscious” Johnny had a five-year run all over the world: Indianapolis, the WWWF, Japan, Atlanta, ‘Frisco, and the AWA—we won belts everywhere.

Q: Your opponents in the WWWF were some of the biggest names of the time: Strongbow and Monsoon, Strongbow and Bruno, and Bruno and Zbyszko. Yet somehow you guys survived with the belts. How do you explain that kind of push?

A: We were there for 15 months, and we held the belts for 14 of those months. It was the longest anyone had held the WWWF tag team belts to that time. No one had held the belts for over a year. Ivan Putski, Dominic DeNucci, Victor Rivera—all sorts of combinations were thrown at us. We beat Tony Garea and Dean Ho for the title. Then they chased us for over a year. They wore us out, we flew with our blond hair flyin’, and we hugged the belts by the skin of our teeth at the end of each night. Haystacks Calhoun and Andre the Giant came after us with different partners, too.

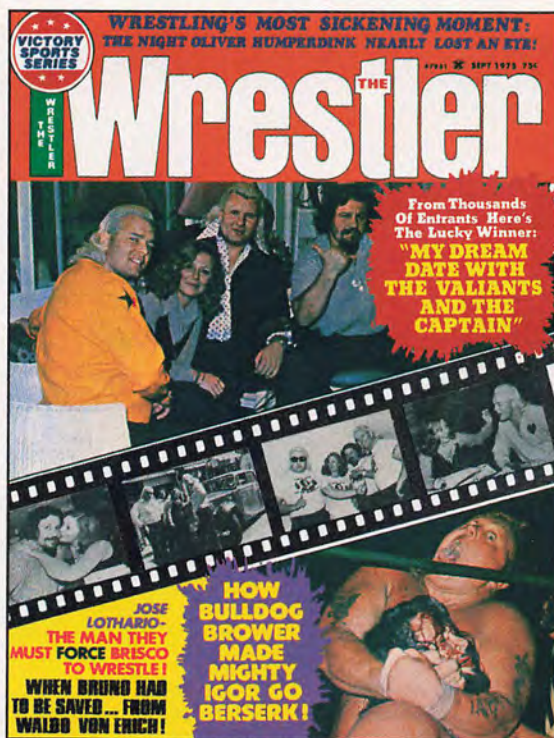


Capt. Lou Albano guided Jimmy and "Luscious" Johnny Valiant to unprecedented tag team success in the WWWF during the mid-'70s, as the trio put together one of the most impressive tag team runs in federation history.

To prove what a box-office draw we were, Bruno Sammartino—who defended the WWWF heavyweight title in Madison Square Garden every month—put the title on hold to come after us. He and Strongbow were considered a dream team, so people assumed we'd lose the belts. We went on fifth at the Garden and the match went 40-something minutes. We hit the 11:00 curfew, and, no matter what was happening, the match had to end. The bell rang and the title didn't switch hands. The next month, Vince put us on third, so the time limit wouldn't be an issue. Capt. Lou Albano got us DQ'd on purpose. Sammartino and Strongbow left us in a big puddle of blood, but we crawled out and still had the World tag team belts. Bruno went back to defending the World heavyweight title and we moved on to another team. It was a hot deal, man.

Q: You touched on somebody I want to ask you about, Capt. Lou Albano. Did he really carry around a machete in a case?

A: Let me tell you about that. Vince Sr. booked me, Johnny, and Capt. Lou for *The Joe Franklin Show*, a TV talk show in New York. It was a live show at 10:00 in the morning, like Johnny Carson's variety show. All the boys stayed at the Edison Hotel. The three of us met downstairs at 9:00 to catch a cab to the studio for the Franklin show. But it was a pretty spring day, it was only four blocks, and we had an hour to spare, so we decided to walk. Usually you can walk over dead people in New York and not turn heads, you know what I'm sayin'? But people stared at us, thought we were from Neptune. Johnny and me had the long blond hair and the Fu Manchu, and we were both about 260. The Captain's got this black hair, this long black goatee, and he's got rubber bands pierced in his eyebrows, and he's about 300 pounds. The Captain has this green Samsonite suitcase, almost like a woman's handbag thing, but you wouldn't tell him that because he'd kill ya. We stop at the first stoplight, Harry, and the Captain puts his bags down, opens up the case, and there's a big machete, maybe 18 inches long, and a fifth of Fleischmann's Whiskey. Hundreds of people are around, and he spun the top off the whiskey, and said, "Through the lips, over the gums, look out stomach, here it comes!" He whacked

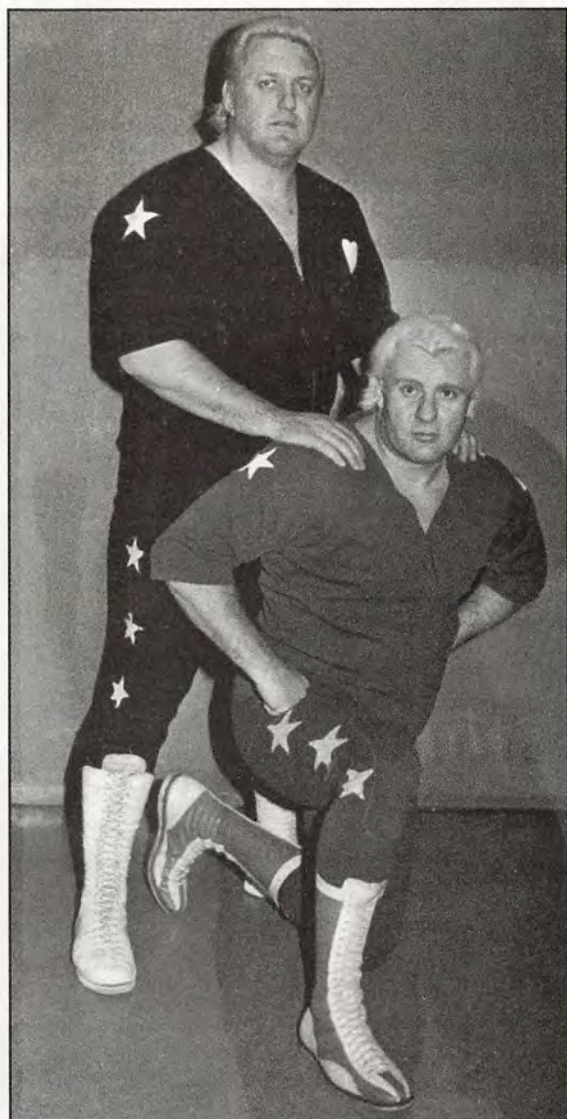


Aside from his in-ring achievements, Valiant was a colorful character that elicited tremendous reaction from the fans. One fan was lucky enough to win a "dream date" with Jimmy, Johnny, and Capt. Lou, which we chronicled in the September 1975 edition of *THE WRESTLER*.

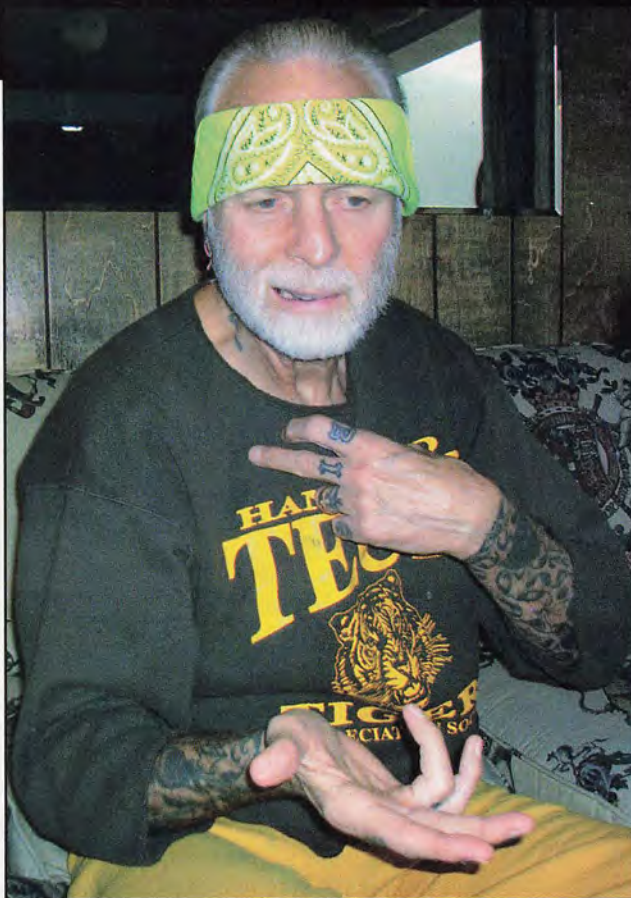
"To prove what a box-office draw we were, Bruno Sammartino—who defended the WWWF heavyweight title in Madison Square Garden every month—put the title on hold to come after us."

out about a third of it and put the lid back on. We walk down to the next block, and he does the same thing. He takes a big hit at every stoplight! By the time we get there, he's just got a swallow left.

He's wide open without drinkin' a drop, so you can imagine what he's like now. They show us to



As Jimmy and Capt. Lou receded from the spotlight, "Gentleman" Jerry was added to the family. Jerry and Johnny would go on to capture a WWWF tag team title of their own.



the green room. We walk in at about 9:45. Across the room, there's Sheila MacRae, who's in some sort of play in New York. Melba Moore, the beautiful black singer, is there to promote her children's book. Then there's a clown from Ringling Brothers/Barnum & Bailey Circus. Of course, we're there to promote the next wrestling show at Madison Square Garden. At about 9:50, the producer comes out. He's a little skinny guy with a fluffy shirt, kinda swishin' around. He says, "Oh, Sheila!" and kisses her Hollywood style. Then he says, "Oh, Melba!" and kisses her. He acknowledges the clown. He comes over to us and says, "Oh, you guys must be The Valiant Brothers, and you must be Capt. Joe!" And Lou goes crazy! "Capt. Joe?! Capt. Joe?! I'll give ya Capt. Joe!" Johnny and me had to control him. The guy drops his clipboard, squeals like a woman, *aaaaah!*, and runs down the hall! The dude's still screaming, *Aaaaah!* I look over at Sheila, and Melba, and the clown, and all of them have their mouths open. I said, "Hey, everything's cool, everything's good." They were scared to death.

Five minutes later, another guy—the director—came out and said, "Look, guys, Joe Franklin says The Valiant Brothers are welcome to come on if you choose to, but Joe prefers that Capt. Lou not go on with you." I said, "Give us one second, brother." I told the Captain that it was his call. If Lou didn't want us to do it, we wouldn't do it. See,



Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

Thanks in part to Jimmy's showmanship, the Valiants' popularity was such that they received a warm welcome from the Japanese during their overseas tours.

Vince Sr. had set this up, and Franklin didn't want to disappoint Vince. The Captain was still hot, but he said, "You've got to do it or the old man will fire me." So we went on the show without the Captain. Later, Vince smoothed over the whole situation, and told Joe, "The Captain is good entertainment, and we'll make sure he doesn't drink before the show anymore."

In November 1996, Tony Garea inducted Johnny and me into the WWF Hall of Fame. Do you remember who inducted Capt. Lou that same year? Joe Franklin! The Captain might have botched his first appearance, but he went on to be on that show 75 times. I read Joe Franklin's autobiography, and he said Capt. Lou was on his show more times than anybody.

Q: You mean Merv Griffin had Orson Welles, and Joe Franklin had Lou Albano?

A: That's it, brother.

Q: Later in the '70s, Jerry Valiant was brought in as a third brother. It seemed that you took a backseat with Lou Albano, with Jerry and Johnny becoming the primary team. Am I remembering that correctly?

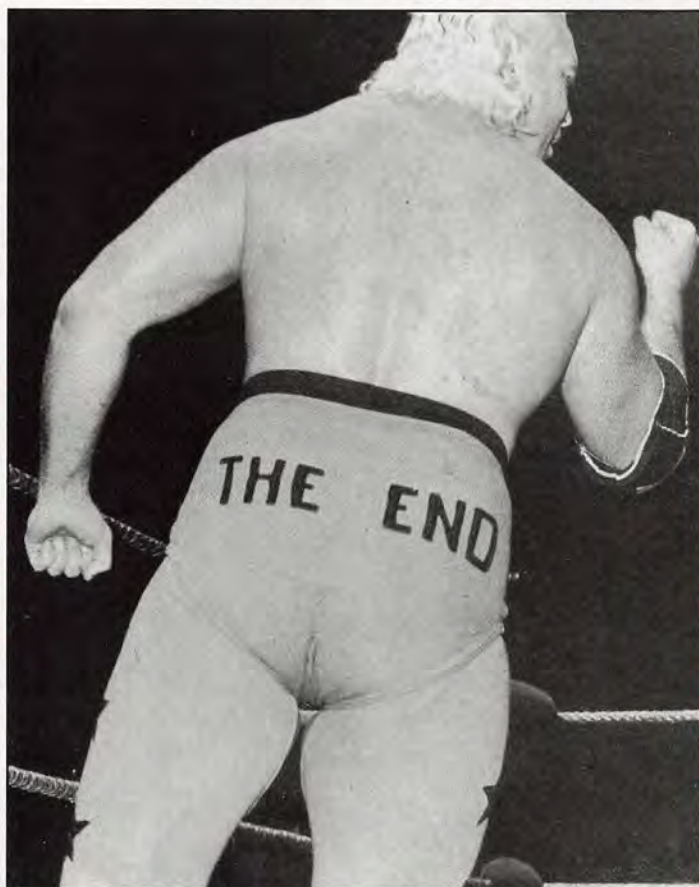
A: Yes, sir. When I was leaving after my first run, Vince Sr. told me, "You've handled yourself well, you're a gentleman, we love how you do business, and you're welcome to come back every four years. So I came back in 1974 for that great run with Johnny. In 1978, Johnny and I came back and did six weeks of TV tapings. Three weeks

later, we went back and did six more tapes—so they had 12 weeks of tapes on me and Johnny. That day, I told Johnny I thought I had the boogie woogie flu because I was sicker than nine dogs, brother. I couldn't hold my head up. Between matches and interviews, I would lay down to rest. So all these tapes and money were invested in The Valiant Brothers, and a week later I find out I have two types of hepatitis. I was flat on my back; it was the most death-defying time of my life.

In the meantime, Vince brought in The Stomper (John Hill) as "Gentleman" Jerry Valiant. I was out for maybe four or five months, and Vince would send me \$500 here and there. What a man. Who else would have done that? I was brought back for six-man tags first. We were the first regular six-man tag team, before The Freebirds. Then I went single because I was the original Valiant brother, and Johnny and Jerry were established as the regular tag team.

Q: How do you think you caught hepatitis? Was it all those bloody matches of that era?

A: The doctors didn't know and neither did I. The doctors told my wife at the time that I wouldn't make it to spring. I dropped down to a pitiful weight, man. My



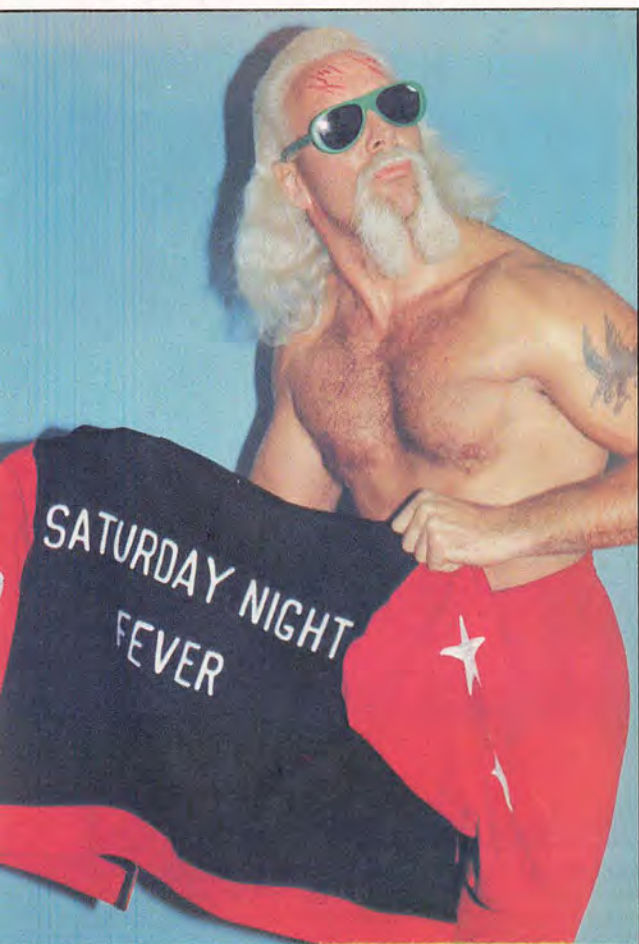
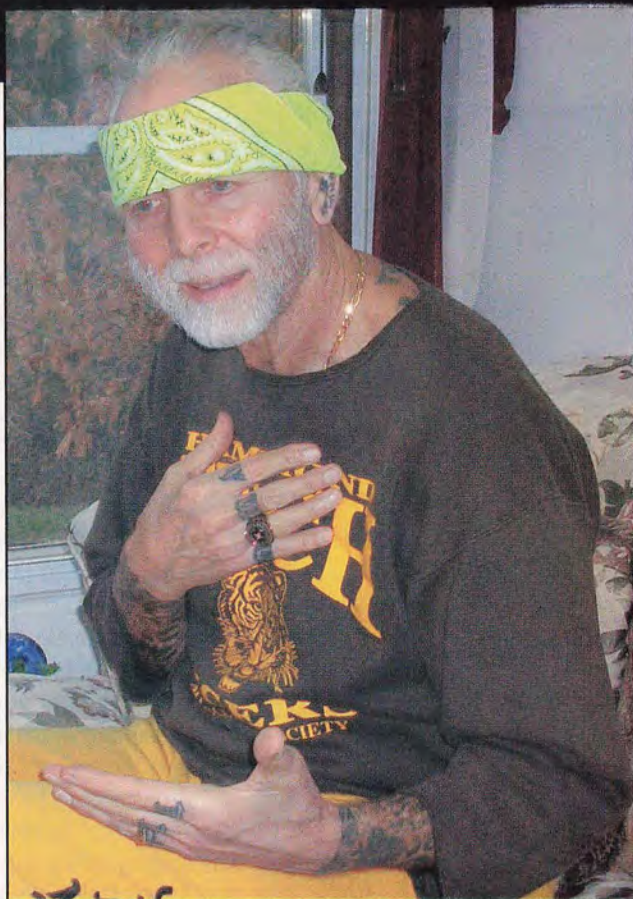
From his early days (above) to the later years (right), Valiant's method of promoting the sport included stitching various messages into his ring attire.

"The doctors told my wife at the time that I wouldn't make it to spring. I dropped down to a pitiful weight, man. My legs looked like my arms. It was a bad scene."

legs looked like my arms. It was a bad scene. But then I started digesting food, and my liver and kidneys began functioning again. God helped me through that, Harry, and He gave me strength to crawl, then walk, then run. It made me a better man.

Q: After your final run in the WWWF, you were very dominant in Memphis. Weren't you the Southern champion for about a year?

A: I forgot how many times I had the title. Yes, one time I did have it that long. Lawler broke his leg and was going to be out for a complete year. Jerry Jarrett called me and said they'd make me the third king of Memphis, after Jackie Fargo and Lawler. I carried the territory for a year. I was over so strong against the bad guys, I could pull hair, poke eyes, and hit 'em



with chairs, and the people loved it. Now it's cool to be a heel. I don't mean to brag, but I was one of the trendsetters for that. I give Dick the Bruiser credit for being the first. I also had music and put stuff on my tights and jacket long before other people.

Q: I remember seeing a picture of you on the last page of the Winter 1975 Wrestling Picture Book. Appropriately, it was a shot of the back of your tights that said "The End."

A: Yes, "The End." I just used whatever was hot, brother. When *Star Wars* came out, I had "Chick-bacca" on my tights. Also sayings from *Saturday Night Fever*. In Memphis, I was on FM 100 so much that the radio station bought me a shimmer jacket and tights with "FM 100 Means Music" on it. I wore those everywhere: Memphis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Florida. Everybody knew about FM 100!

Q: You were the first wrestler to have an endorsement deal!

A: I was a wrestling billboard, brother. When I was losing so much as a heel, I told the boys I should put "Eat At Joe's" on the bottom of my shoes because I was always flat on my back.

Q: When did you become the "Boogie Woogie Man"? Was that in Memphis?

A: No, it was in Charlotte, North Carolina. I came in as a heel, playing off the "Handsome" Jimmy persona. They called me King James; that was their twist on it. They teamed me with Greg Valentine for a very short



Though he often dressed as a southern gentleman, the "Boogie Woogie Man" just as often portrayed the New York bad-ass—especially in front of southern crowds. His ability to reshape his persona lengthened Valiant's career.

okay. I said, "Let me come out to music." Ole said, "What?!" I told him that I came out to my own music in Memphis, I got people dancin' in the aisles, and I hugged the people on the way to the ring. Ole said, "Whatever." He told me to throw the razor away and go to Memphis for three weeks. I had used my own song, "Son Of Gypsy," in Memphis, but, for the Mid-Atlantic, I chose "The Boy From New York City" by Manhattan Transfer because that was the hot song at the time. I hadn't kissed people in Memphis, but I started that in the Mid-Atlantic. I came through the crowd, huggin' and kissin' men, women, children, grandma, grandpa, white, black, blue, purple, David Crockett, everybody.

Q: I remember that you put a rose in Bob Caudle's mouth and kissed him on the lips!

A: Again, I had to be different, and it was all up to me. I would go in the bleachers, in the balconies. They'd have to play the song three or four times because sometimes it took me 10 minutes to get in the ring!

time. The hot team there was Ebony Diamond (Rocky Johnson) and "Bad" Leroy Brown, and we went around the loop with them. Memphis called Jim Crockett Promotions and asked if I'd fly in to team with Lawler for one shot on a Monday. When I got back Tuesday morning, I went to do interviews at the office. Jim Crockett asked, "Why didn't you tell me you were a character babyface in Memphis?" I was always "Handsome" Jimmy in Memphis, but I'd been there so long that I couldn't do no wrong. I'd pull hair and all the heel stuff, and the people would lie to the referee for me. Jerry Jarrett had told them I was helping to sell out the Mid-South Coliseum and that he wanted me for at least three more Monday shots. Ole wanted me to do the same in the Mid-Atlantic, but he didn't like the nickname "Handsome" for a babyface. I said, "How about the 'Boogie Woogie Man'?" Ole looked at Crockett, and Crockett shook his head

They put me against Ivan Koloff right off the bat. He was a machine; he was in shape and I was in shape. He was the Mid-Atlantic TV champion, and I chased him seven days a week for nine months, brother. The rule was if you couldn't beat the champion in 20 minutes, then the bell rang and he kept the belt. We'd go 20 minutes everywhere. For 19 of those 20 minutes, I'm wailin' on him. He's sellin', he's flyin', backdroppin', and bleedin'. The people knew that if I only had two more minutes, I'd beat him. We'd come back with a 30-minute time limit, shoot another angle, then a lumberjack match, then a cage, just keep going. Then they put me against One Man Gang with Sir Oliver Humperdink as his manager. Then it was the "Boogie Woogie Man" against Kabuki with Gary Hart as his manager.

Of course, I stayed six or seven years there, and ended up feuding with Paul Jones and his Army for most of that time. Shaska Whatley, The Barbarian, Manny Fernandez, "Superstar" Billy Graham, Abdullah the Butcher, Teijo Khan, and The Assassins were all in Jones' Army at one time or another. That may be the longest-running feud in history, besides Lawler and me.

Q: And the sole purpose of all these guys was to eliminate you. Paul Jones' Army reminded me of the Island of Misfit Toys. Did you take pride in the fact that you kept so many freaks employed?



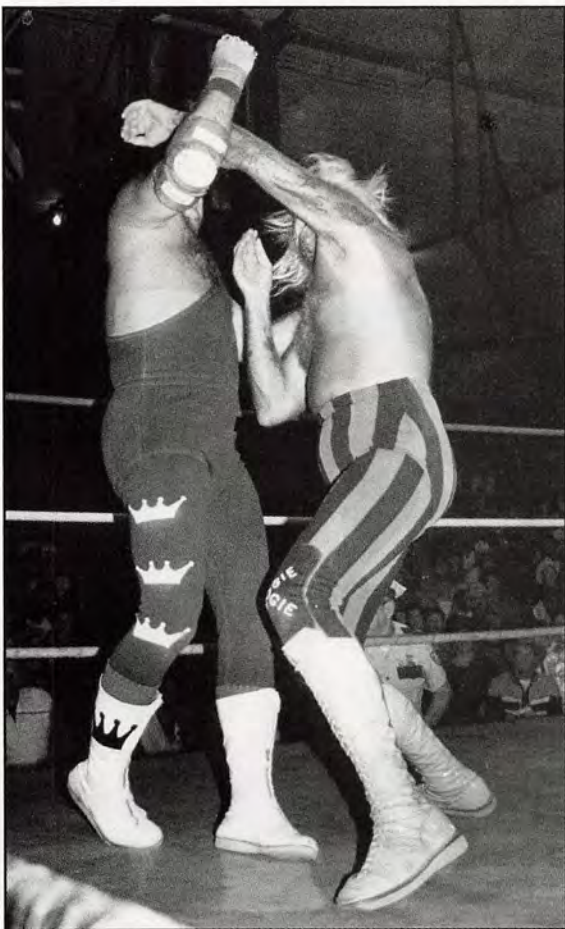
Charlie Brown "from Outta Town" was a popular alter ego Valiant developed in the mid-'80s after dropping a loser-leaves-town match in the NWA. Valiant revived the Brown character any time he was prevented from appearing in the ring.

"Everything's timing in life, and I reinvented myself to become the 'Boogie Woogie Man.' I got a little heavier and didn't work out as much, somewhat on purpose, because 'Boogie Woogie' was a street person who loved everybody, laughin', huggin', and kissin'."

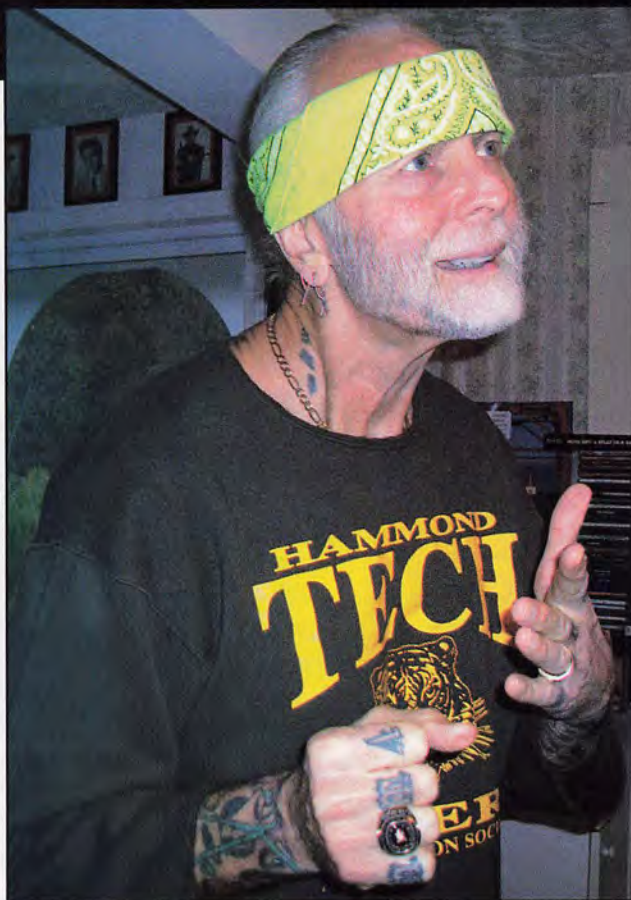
A: Yes, sir. And I had some good partners, too, like Buggy McGraw, Dusty Rhodes, and Magnum T.A.

Q: Did you gravitate toward the "Boogie Woogie" character because it's closer to your own personality?

A: For sure, I would say that. I was the fifth child of southern parents, and I went to the Pentecostal Assembly of God until I was 15. I didn't miss a Sunday service or an evening service unless I was



A native Tennessean, Valiant returned to the Volunteer State to battle Jerry Lawler in the early-'90s. Their feud went down as one of the best in USWA history.



so sick they couldn't take me. I'm very loving. I'll meet somebody in the middle of the street to give 'em a big hug. Ric Flair, Buddy Landell, and other younger blonds were coming up, and I thought it was time for a change. Everything's timing in life, and I reinvented myself to become the "Boogie Woogie Man." I got a little heavier and didn't work out as much, somewhat on purpose, because "Boogie Woogie" was a street person who loved everybody, laughin', huggin', and kissin'. I had 20 years as a bad guy and 20 years as a good guy.

Q: In Jerry Lawler's autobiography, he said they were so desperate to keep you that they offered to buy a house for you. Is that true?

A: While I was with Jim Crockett in the early-'80s, Lawler and Jarrett were always begging me to come back to Memphis. I said, "You buy me a house, and I'll sign a contract and work for you from then on." I figured this was either going to cook or not, that I'd either get a house or they'd leave me alone. In a week's time, Lawler called and said Jarrett had already okayed it and had already talked to Crockett. They said for me to come the next week, pick out my house, and we'd do a five-year contract. I went and picked a nice house in Memphis with a swimming pool. I said they'd have to move me, too, and they agreed. The company would make the payments, and that was quite a few thousand, considering it would be paid off in five years. That was cool, so I signed a five-year deal and they

put me on salary. But they started booking me outside of Memphis all the time. Crockett would call and say he needed "Boogie" in Greensboro, Richmond, or Charlotte, and I was in the Mid-Atlantic for weeks at a time. They sent me to Puerto Rico. Lawler and me went to Japan—it was my fifth time and his first time—and we made it all the way to a tournament final against Giant Baba and Jumbo Tsu-ruta. We were there for only six days and made \$4,000, all of which went to the office. I was at the Mid-South Coliseum nearly every Monday, but it seemed like I was gone the rest of the time.

Finally, Crockett got his show on Turner's SuperStation. He and Dusty Rhodes said they wanted me as part of their A-team and asked what it would take to get me back. I told them I wanted to work in just one place so I could get home at least two or three days a week. I gave Lawler the house keys and the Mid-America belt back, and said I couldn't do it anymore. It was nothing personal because I loved Lawler and Jarrett and had made so much money with them. In Lawler's book, he said I split after six weeks, but it was a full six months.

Q: Back in the early-'80s, we published photos from inside your home, including a beautiful painting by Lawler. He depicted you as a centaur in the painting.

A: I do have paintings from Lawler. He did depict me as a centaur, a horse with a man's chest and arms, on a huge, round, wooden canvas. He's a terrific artist. Adrian Street is a good artist, too.

Q: Your style in the ring changed as the "Boogie Woogie Man." You would hit somebody a couple of times, drop the big flying elbowsmash, and the match would be over in 15 or 30 seconds. The knock against you was your work rate, at least on TV. Was that intentional on your part?

A: You bet. It was my idea to do that because nobody was beating people in just seconds. The people weren't cheated at the arenas because I could go for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, or an hour, like I did with Koloff. As far as the sheets commenting, hey, at least



Photo by Jim Conette

Valiant, who often claimed to be a man of the people, spends some quality time with his fans in Memphis, where he became known as the "Third King Of Memphis" behind Lawler and Jackie Fargo.

they called attention to what we were trying to do. Since that helped me get over so strong, they did the same with Magnum T.A. when he came in a few years later, saying he was trying to beat my record.

Q: I think he hit that belly-to-belly in eight seconds!

A: They said he had broken the "Boogie Woogie Man's" record.

Q: The angles back then were simple but very entertaining. I remember Sir Oliver Humperdink writ-



Photo by Mike Lano

Valiant poses with Ted DiBiase at WrestleReunion Weekend in January 2005—the last time he wrestled in a sanctioned match. However, Valiant intends to wrestle one final match in 2010, which means he'll have wrestled in six different decades.

"I gave Lawler the house keys and the Mid-America belt back, and said I couldn't do it anymore. It was nothing personal because I loved Lawler and Jarrett and had made so much money with them."

ing bad checks to Jos LeDuc, and you convinced LeDuc that Humberdink was trying to rip him off. Kabuki spewed green mist in your eyes, so you started wearing goggles in the ring. You lost a loser-leaves-town match, so you came back with a mask as Charlie Brown, "the man from Outta Town." What were some of your favorite antics at the time?

A: I did a tug-of-war with One Man Gang, who claimed nobody could slam him. I had feuds with LeDuc, Koloff, and Tully Blanchard. The huge one in the Mid-Atlantic was my feud with Paul Jones and The Assassins. I tried to take their masks with all kinds of partners for one year. I was wrestling some kid on the TV show, and Jones and The Assassins came into the ring and tied me to the ropes while the other heels in his Army held the good guys' dressing



room door closed. I had a long beard to my waist, and they cut off the beard up to my chin. I disappeared for three weeks. The cameras caught me on Skid Row, sitting on the curb with the winos.

Q: The street people!

A: Yes, I was with my street people. Paul Jones and The Assassins took something away from "Boogie Woogie." I said, "I have nothing left but my heart and my soul and the hair on my head." That's when I put my long, blond hair against The Assassins' masks at Starrcade. I unmasked Assassin #2, who turned out to be Hercules Hernandez. Personal issues are the hottest angles, Harry.

Q: I recall that your feud with Paul Jones had a very simple beginning. Jones brought out a huge, glossy picture of himself wearing a tuxedo, and said that he would give the portrait to a lucky fan. At the end of the show, you came out with a magic marker and drew a mustache, glasses, and even a smoking cigarette on Jones' face. Did you have any idea that feud would go so long? Why did it go so long?

A: Years ago, they would let a feud go on and on, feeding it with different twists and turns. That Paul Jones feud lasted five years.

Q: That feud really brought out the best in "Pistol" Pez Whatley. He was a very plain fan favorite until he turned against you and became Shaska Whatley. He proved to be a great talker and very charismatic.

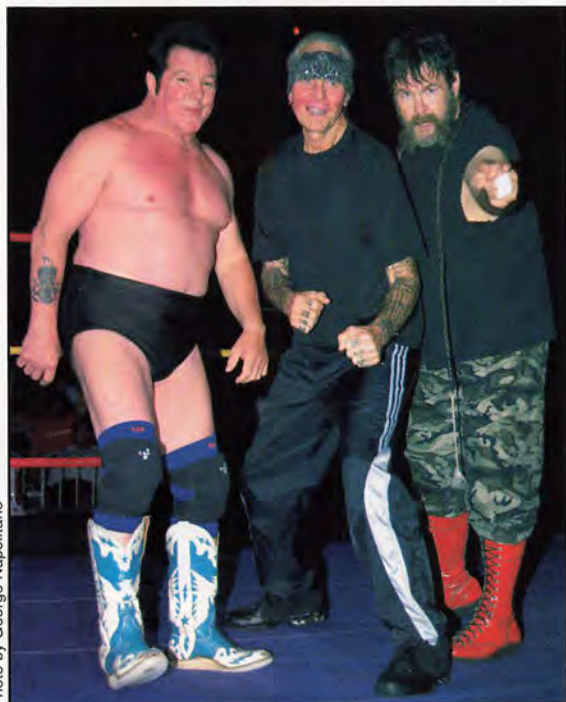


Photo by George Napolitano

What? A Memphis Wrestling supercard without Jimmy Valiant? Not a chance! Valiant was partnered up for one night only with fellow Memphis stalwarts Dundee and Dutch Mantell in 2007.



These days, Valiant's passions include his wrestling school in Shawsville, Virginia, (above), his wife Angel (right), and their 10 grandchildren, the youngest of which is seven-month-old Myah Grace Williams (below). Neither the passage of time nor a life-and-death battle with hepatitis has dulled the "Boogie Woogie Man's" lust for life.



A: He was another Tennessee boy. We were born only 70 miles apart. I was born in Tullahoma, Tennessee, and he was born in Chattanooga right up I-24, man. He was a great collegiate wrestler, like Baron Von Raschke. When "Pistol" Pez joined Paul Jones, he really shined. He would come out strutting with his top hat, cane, and tails. What a talker.

Q: You ended up shaving him bald, right?

A: Yes. I had to go through the entire Army, shaving their heads bald, before I could get Jones in a hair-vs.-hair match. Finally, I was set to wrestle Jones at Starrcade. In the interviews, I said Paul Jones had been one of the best wrestlers in the world at one time, but hadn't wrestled in five years and was out of shape. I was still razor-sharp. I beat him all over the ring, he was bleedin', and then I got swerved by interference, and he beat me one-two-three! The people were so sure I'd have an easy time with Jones that they went crazy when I lost. But I sat in the ring and took my head shaving like a man.

Q: I remember that was a shocking defeat for you. No one expected that to happen.

A: It went from a roar to dead silence—white heat. That just worked up our feud for the Bashes, and I finally got his hair in the big blowoff.

Q: He finally became a bald-headed geek.

A: I would lead the people in those "bald-headed geek" chants. It's great that you remember, Harry, super.

Q: I think of how incredibly popular you were, and how that has remained a lasting popularity. One

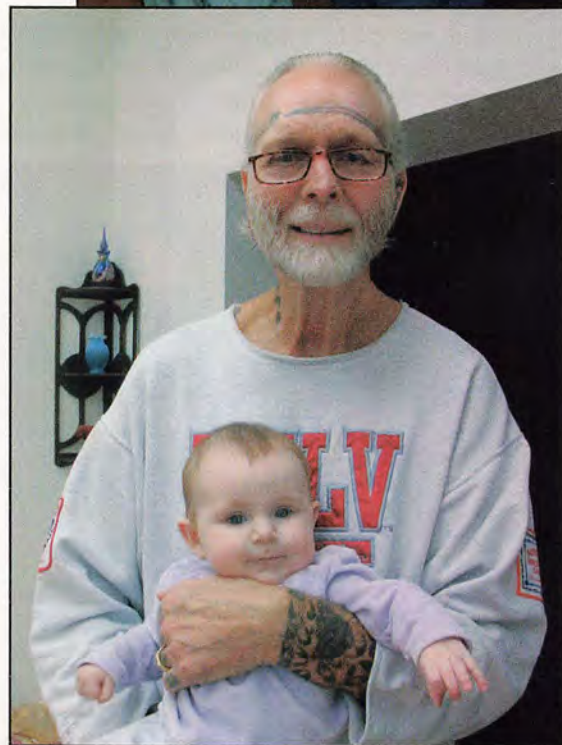


Photo by Angel Valiant

of our sister magazines, *Inside Wrestling*, offered readers the chance to send a self-addressed stamped envelope in return for an official Boogie Woogie Brigade card. I carried that card until I was 30 years old! I know other people who have that card to this day.

"I now weigh the same as I did as a senior in high school. I'm not a real big-boned guy, so I force-fed myself and took steroids to get up to 290 pounds during my career."

A: I remember that running in your magazine. That's wonderful, brother. I also remember Bill Apter helping to arrange a contest where a lucky lady could win a date with The Valiant Brothers and Capt. Lou. We got two covers out of that, one for the issue that announced the contest and another for the issue featuring the winner. I was on the cover of your magazines—either as the main photo or a secondary one—nearly a dozen times during my first 15 months in New York.

Q: You left the NWA in the late-'80s and wound up in the USWA. Why did you leave Jim Crockett?

A: I had signed a three-year contract with him, like everyone else. One of the conditions before Ted Turner bought out Crockett in November 1988 was that all of our contracts had to be fulfilled beforehand. We were all welcome to work for WCW, but Turner wanted all of us to live in Atlanta. The reason is that Turner had a good deal with Delta Airlines, and all the members of his professional sports teams in Atlanta—as well as all the wrestlers—were expected to use Delta. The only exception was Flair, who was allowed to stay in Charlotte. But Ivan Koloff, Paul Jones, Wahoo McDaniel, and I chose not to go. All of us were older, but I don't think that was the issue for most of us. We were used to fighting for our spots. I was going through a divorce, so I just wanted to kick back and do some independent things. The Rock 'n' Roll Express, Buddy Landell, Manny Fernandez, Tommy Rich, and I still did well on the independent circuit. And I did shots in Memphis because it was the territory that held on the longest.

Q: How come we never got a Valiant Brothers reunion?

A: Actually, a promoter got Jerry, Johnny, and me together for a legends fanfest in New Jersey in the 1990s. WWE wasn't involved, so that's probably why you didn't hear of it.

Q: You wrestled your final match at WrestleReunion 2005. Who was your opponent and how did the match go?

A: It was a six-man with me, Roddy Piper, and Jimmy Snuka against Bob Orton Jr., "Playboy" Buddy Rose, and Col. DeBeers.



Q: That was a star-studded event.

A: Yes. It ended in a big schmo where all the wrestlers entered the ring and it was thrown out, a double-DQ.

Q: Will you ever step in the ring again?

A: I've been a referee, a second, and a manager for different events. I do book signings on the weekends, but I haven't wrestled in four years. Yet I do plan to do one more match. If I wrestle one more match in 2010, I will have wrestled in six decades. I do an annual fundraiser for the volunteer fire department here in Shawsville, Virginia. So, in May of 2010, I'll put the boots on one more time for that benefit. Don't worry, I'm not coming out of retirement 500 times like Terry Funk, man.

Q: I noticed that you've dropped a lot of your wrestling weight. Did you go vegetarian or embrace healthy living?

A: Yes, I'm very proud of this. I now weigh the same as I did as a senior in high school. I'm not a real big-boned guy, so I force-fed myself and took steroids to get up to 290 pounds during my career. I am a vegetarian now, but I do eat tuna fish and chicken for protein. I work hard at staying lean.

Q: One final question: Does Paul Jones still have a bounty on your head?

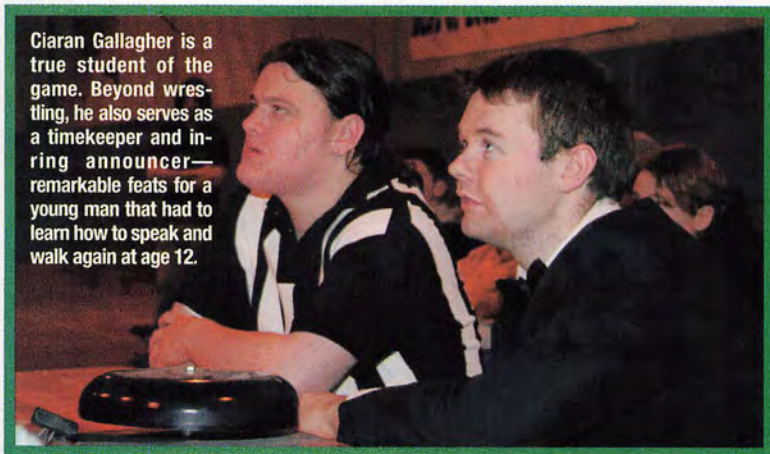
A: There's more than one bounty on my head. I'm sure Paul Jones and Jerry Lawler have bounties on me. If Dick the Bruiser were still living, he'd have one on me, too! □

When Doctors Told The Boy He'd Never Compete Again ...

CIARAN GALLAGHER BECAME A

Suffering a stroke is enough to crush the spirit of even the strongest-willed individuals. But Ciaran Gallagher was not about to spend the remainder of his life in the victim's role. After suffering a stroke at age 12, the Celtic Pro Wrestling veteran defied the odds—and the doctors—that said he'd never compete at sports again

Ciaran Gallagher is a true student of the game. Beyond wrestling, he also serves as a timekeeper and in-ring announcer—remarkable feats for a young man that had to learn how to speak and walk again at age 12.

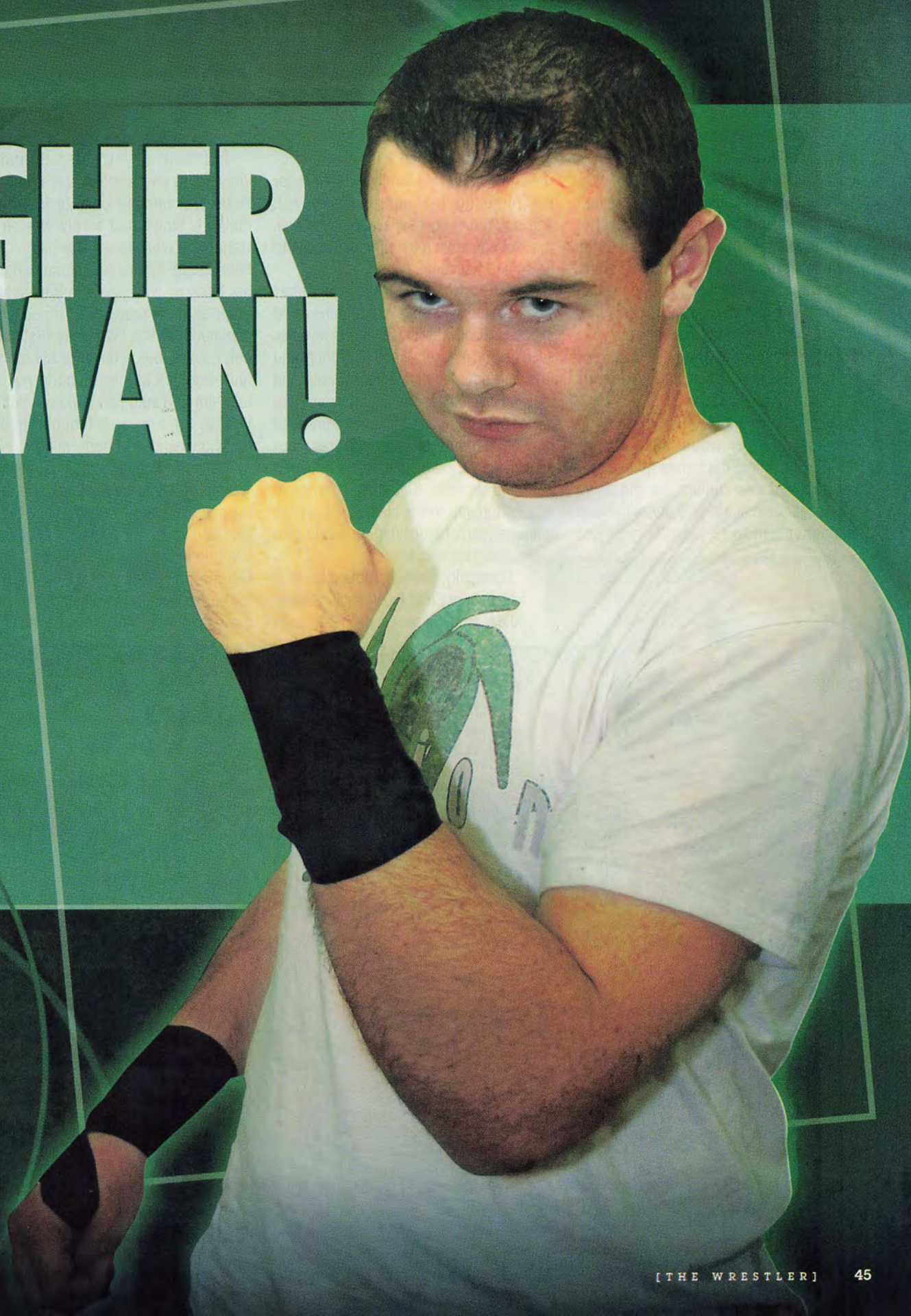


BY BRADY HICKS
PHOTOS BY BLAKE NORTON

THE LUCK OF the Irish has to be shining on Ciaran Gallagher.

At only 12, the future Celtic Pro Wrestling star and tag team champion suffered a debilitating stroke that left the entire right side of his body unresponsive. According to doctors, it was an extremely rare and random incident that happened without any real cause. It occurred right after he had finished competing in a soccer game and gotten into his family's car.

GHER MAN!



Such an unexpected and severe occurrence turned the young man's world upside-down—not only sully the chance to pursue a professional soccer career (as many thought he could), but also blotting out his potential to excel at any endeavor.

At a time when most young boys are playing sports and socializing with friends, Gallagher had to face a different reality.

"It was a very difficult time in my life," the 21-year-old recently recalled. "Not just physically, but psychologically as well. Not only was everything different, but I was taken out of school and we had to move several hours away, to Dublin, as a family, so they could be with me while I started rehabilitating."

He would never see his old friends and classmates again.

More than eight months of grueling physical therapy would soon follow, during which time the former athlete saw his hopes of ever running up and down the soccer field again fade away. Instead, Gallagher had to re-learn how to just

walk, which took six to seven months, and talk, which took two months.

Even worse, dealing with his unresponsive right arm was a unique challenge. Not only would Gallagher be forced to live without use of the atrophied limb, but, being right-handed, he had to learn to write again.

"Fortunately, I had a lot of support," Gallagher said. "My family was there for me, rerouting their entire lives for me. The children in my new school were nice, too. Nobody gave me a difficult time. And I also had wrestling."

Shortly after his stroke, Gallagher started gathering inspiration from the world of professional wrestling. Photos of favorites such as Steve Austin, Vince McMahon, and Bret Hart adorned his bedroom walls, and drawing inspiration from their personal and professional battles, Gallagher convinced himself to continue his own brave but difficult fight. Even though he never figured he could wrestle, Gallagher soon gave serious thought to the idea. In his middle teenage years, he decided he would give wrestling his best effort.

Eventually, Gallagher found his way to the door of Celtic Pro Wrestling trainer Blake Norton. Ciaran was eager to learn

how to be the next WWE superstar.

"When he first came to me at age 18, his mother told me he had a 'weakness in his right arm,' but that he had been cleared to wrestle," recalled Norton. "But it took him more than 45 minutes to get into the ring because he couldn't even lift his leg over the rope."

But that didn't deter Gallagher, whose first challenge was learning how to protect himself despite his limited mobility. Slowly but surely, Norton and Gallagher worked on the basics, and before long, Ciaran could take bumps on his back as well as any other aspiring grappler in the promotion. "It's so funny," continued Norton. "When we first started out, I never took a dollar of his money. I took one look at him, all gung-ho, and I told him he could just hang out with us. I never, for a second, thought he'd actually be capable of performing."

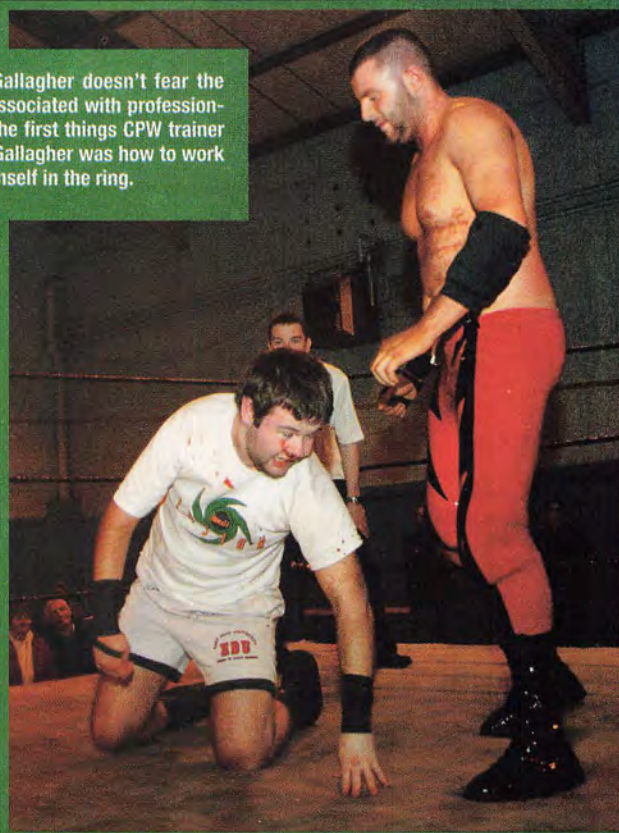
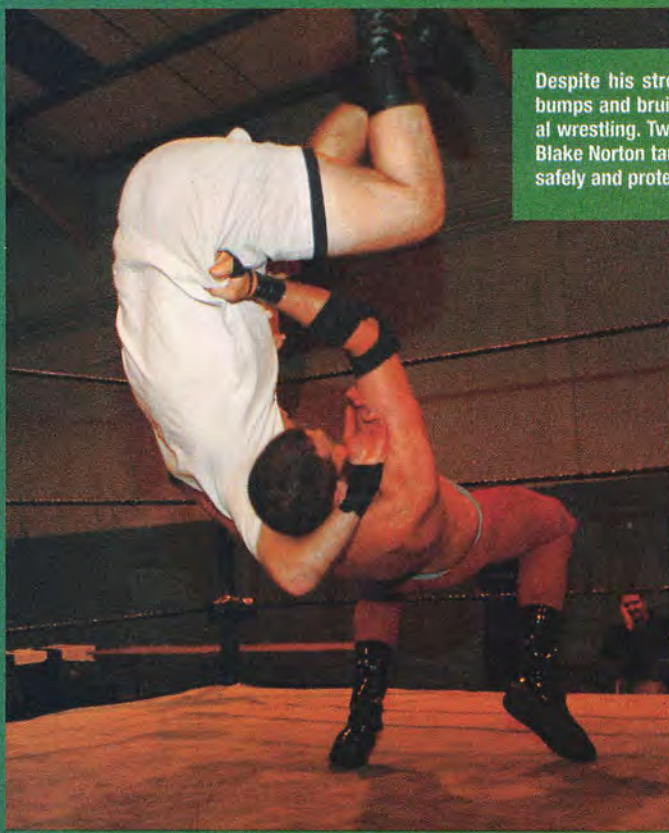
Naturally, Gallagher's biggest concern was his ability to stay safe. "Blake taught me different ways to work around things," said Gallagher. "Of course, it is difficult. I can't do bodyslams or suplexes because half the strength just isn't there. But after the stroke, I couldn't walk or talk or hardly move, and that came around. When I look



Even though he has limited use of his right arm, Gallagher has not let that stop him from pursuing his dream of one day working a WrestleMania. He has learned to use other strengths to toss opponents (left) and work them on the mat until they have no fight left in them (right).



Despite his stroke, Gallagher doesn't fear the bumps and bruises associated with professional wrestling. Two of the first things CPW trainer Blake Norton taught Gallagher was how to work safely and protect himself in the ring.



around, I am so thankful that I have been able to do all that I have with my life."

From these initial one-on-one training sessions with Norton to his first professional match to several years of competition, Gallagher has gained confidence in his ring abilities. And some day, he wants to show WWE what he has up his sleeve.

"Like a lot of wrestlers, working for WWE is my dream job," he said. "I know I'm not there yet, but I'm trying to learn every day and I'm hoping I'll get to that level some day. I want to headline WrestleMania—maybe an international WrestleMania—maybe even live from Dublin."

But does Ciaran Gallagher really have a legitimate shot to make it to the ultimate stage? "Aside from the whole Zach Gowen/curiosity/awe factor Ciaran has going on, he is a really great wrestler with a sound grasp of everything he needs to succeed," Norton explained. "I know he can succeed, with or without this awful condition. Ciaran Gallagher is a great kid, and a better friend. He's like a son to me. And he really gets it. I don't want to put pressure on the kid, but I would not be surprised to see great things from him in the future. Take all of his physical limitations away, and Ciaran has some real talent and ability. He can be something really special some day. And I'm not just

saying that because he survived a stroke. I'm saying it because he's been one of my most talented students."

"I just really wanted it," concluded Gallagher, now a member of the CPW roster for two full years. "Sure, some things are

difficult. You can't fight or defend yourself so easy when you can't even use your fingers. But I'm doing okay. I'm living my dream. What else could I ask for out of life?"

To see more of Ciaran, visit his website, ciarangallagher.net □

Even if Gallagher never won a championship title, just making it as far as he has in pro wrestling would be a crowning achievement for the young stroke victim.



OUR REID ON YOUNG FLAIR:

**IF HE CAN SURVIVE
THAT PRESSURE-PACKED
DEBUT, HE'S ON
TO GREATNESS**

Early-match jitters were quelled by big brother David. David spent some time during the 1990s under the wing of dad Ric. Whatever jitters were there didn't show, as Reid performed splendidly.



With just one match under his belt, it's too early to know if Reid Flair is destined for superstardom, but what he showed in his pro debut makes us think he's on the right path

BY DAN MURPHY

PHOTOS BY MATT ROBERTS

THE BUTTERFLIES IN his stomach were normal; everyone who has ever laced up a pair of boots and stepped into the ring for their first pro wrestling bout has experienced pre-match jitters.

For most young wrestlers, that first match takes place in front of a couple of hundred people in a high school gym, armory, or fire hall—if they're lucky. Whether that wrestler wins, loses, or stinks up the joint entirely, the debut match generally doesn't make or break a career. But on this particular night, 20-year-old Reid Flair knew the stakes were much higher. Failure simply was not an option.

Flair heard the bell sound to signal Ricky Steamboat Jr.'s win over Jake Manning. He burned through a quick set of squats and tried to tune out the crowd noise and the churning in his gut. He glanced around the locker room. There was his father, the 16-time world champion, a cherished icon in the wrestling industry for nearly four decades. The referee was wearing a sleeveless striped shirt, his vaunted 24-inch pythons perhaps a couple of inches smaller, but unmistakable as a pop culture icon and the most famous wrestler of all-time. His opponents for this tag team match weren't two fellow greenhorns—they were the 1994 *PWI* Tag Team of the Year winners, The Nasty Boys, accompanied to the ring by legendary manager of champions Jimmy Hart.





Reid needed all the help he could get from guest referee Hulk Hogan as The Nasty Boys cut him no slack. Taking every chance to cheat and make things harder for the rookie, Jerry Sags and Brian Knobbs wanted to make sure young Reid remembered his first appearance in the ring.

And Reid Flair's debut match was the main event, being taped for a national DVD release.

The December 6, 2008, debut of Reid Flair was one of the most unique and highly anticipated events wrestling had seen in years. Reid, the youngest son of the "Nature Boy" Ric Flair had been an amateur standout who chose to begin his career just after his father ended his own. Like many other

rookies, his first match took place in a high school gym, but the crowd was noticeably larger (estimated at 1,100), mostly due to the fact that two titans of the sport—Ric Flair and Hulk Hogan—would be present, Ric as the cornerman for Reid and his brother, David, and Hogan as the guest referee.

As the son of one of the most decorated and respected stars of all-time, Reid was under extraordinary pressure to succeed. His pedigree alone makes

him a virtual lock for a future WWE contract. Though it would be naïve to expect Reid to match his father's accomplishments and unfair to measure him against arguably the greatest wrestler of the 20th century, the bar has been set very high for him. The Flair name is going to be both a blessing and a curse for him.

As far as second-generation hopefuls go, only David Sammartino and Greg Gagne's debuts might be comparable to Reid's circumstance. Sammartino, the son of two-time WWF World champion Bruno Sammartino, quietly debuted in Georgia Championship Wrestling, gaining some experience before coming to the Northeast to join his father in the WWF. David flopped in the WWF; the pressure of trying to escape the looming shadow of his famous father was too much for him.

Gagne, the son of nine-time AWA World champion Verne Gagne, debuted with little fanfare. He paid his dues and eventually developed into a solid tag team competitor, though he never came near his father's status as a main-event talent.

Reid's brother and partner, David,

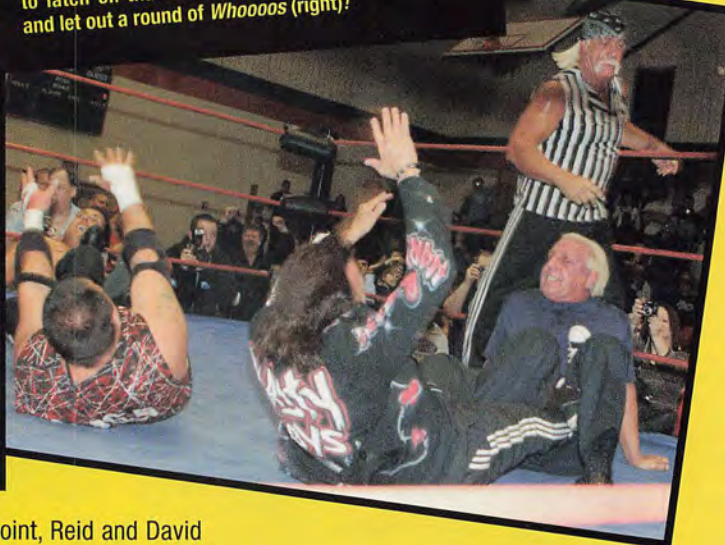


After taking a pounding from The Nasty Boys, Reid fought his way to brother David (left) and made the quick tag for a break. With a full load of energy, David made Sags and Knobbs pay for what they had done to his little brother (right).





Hogan made sure manager Jimmy Hart couldn't interfere anymore (left) and allowed all three Flair's to latch on that world famous figure-four leglock and let out a round of *Whooooo* (right)!



fell victim to Ric's fame during his own lackluster WCW run in the late-1990s. Ric knew Reid would face similar challenges, so he opted to kick off Reid's career in an unorthodox fashion. By calling in favors with Hogan, The Nasty Boys, and Hart, Ric turned Reid's debut into a spectacle.

On this night, the eyes of the wrestling world were on Vance High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Ric was giving Reid a chance to swim ... or to sink.

"Let's face it, just by being his father's son, the pressure is going to be on Reid to achieve great things," said Jimmy Hart after the match. "Tonight, Ric tested him, The Nasty Boys tested him, and the cameras at ringside tested him, and the crowd tested him. And Reid passed that test, baby."

Though he was most certainly nervous on the inside, he didn't show it once he made his way to the ring. He seemed relaxed and confident, probably because he had his brother and old man by his side. Reid may have been the focal point of the show but he didn't get a free pass from Knobbs and Sags. The Nasty Boys battered both Flair boys with stiff punches and kicks. They worked over Reid's back with abdominal stretches and Boston crabs.

Reid never cracked—not under the onslaught of The Nasty Boys, the expectations of the fans, or the watchful eyes of Ric and Hulk. In fact, he seemed to thrive on

the pressure. At one point, Reid and David simultaneously applied the figure-four leglock on both Nasty Boys. Midway through the move, Reid paused for just a moment, and let out the call so closely associated with "The Nature Boy"—*Whoooo!*

The fans left Vance High School with the storybook ending they wanted. Hogan floored the interfering Hart with a kick, then called Ric into the ring to apply the figure-four on the manager. The Flair boys won the match, and Reid and David

soaked in the cheers from the spectators.

It may not have been a pay-per-view or nationally televised event, but Reid showed he has both the physical tools and mindset to overcome the obstacles and succeed. Based on his showing on December 6, we predict fans will be talking about a different Flair for years to come. □

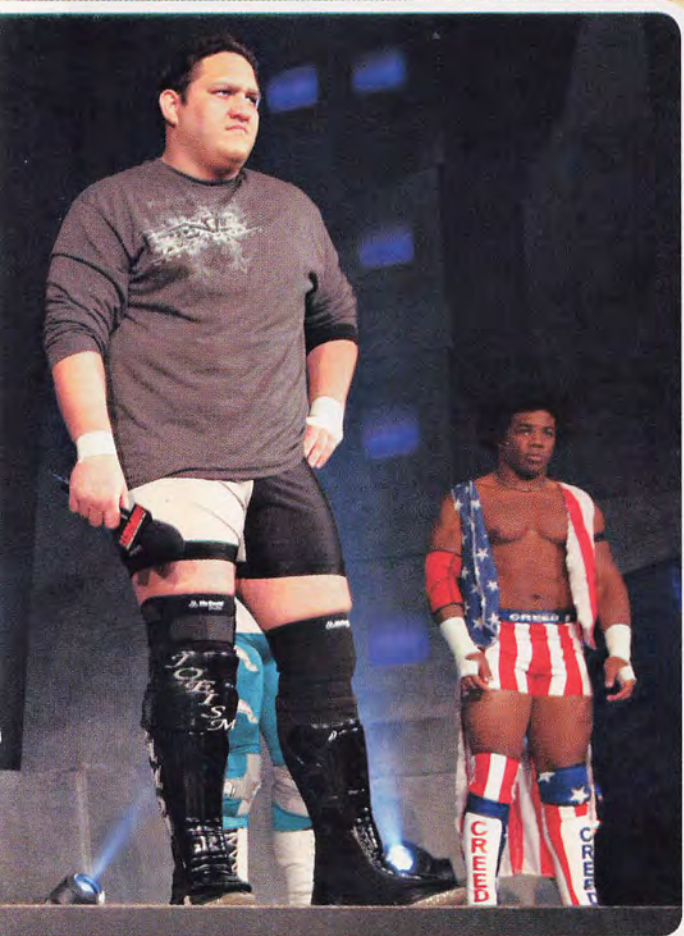
After a hard night of battling, a nice embrace at the end of the night capped off a great showing by all three of the Flair boys. It wasn't the cleanest of victories, but young Reid definitely proved he was worthy of his famous last name.





MAIN EVENT MAFIA VS. FRONTLINE:

Which Faction Will **Implode** First?



If you look closely—or even not so closely—you'll see that neither the Main Event Mafia nor the Frontline is 100 percent united. The team that can repair the fissures first may very well win this high-stakes TNA war

TEXT BY GERRY STRAUSS

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

THERE'S AN IMPORTANT war brewing in TNA, but it isn't the one you think.

Indeed, the entire TNA landscape seems to have been sucked in by the overwhelming battle between the superstar-laden Main Event Mafia and the defiant, youthful members of the Frontline. A multi-generational clash for power, it is easy to assume that both factions are made up of like-minded individuals, committed to working together to emerge victorious and help shape TNA's future in their vision. However, things are never quite as simple as that when ego-

driven superstar athletes are involved.

Most obviously, the lack of team commitment exhibited by The Motor City Machine Guns has caused major problems for the Frontline. Unwilling to take orders from dedicated soldiers such as Rhino; Shelley and Sabin have become more hindrance than help to their faction.

TNA insiders also speculate that Samoa Joe, once considered a Frontline leader, has also shown signs of unrest.

"Joe is a natural leader because of his actions, not his words" explains TNA announcer Mike Tenay. "When you think about it, he has always been more of a loner. He prefers to fight his own battles, and even though he believes in the Frontline cause, I don't think he is all that comfortable working with others."

Certainly, one must believe that no member of the Frontline has forgotten about the ultimate prize in TNA: the TNA World championship currently held by Sting. That begs the question: Are Frontline members more interest-

ed in preventing Sting and other MEM members from monopolizing TNA's title scene or do they merely want the gold to advance their own careers?

"There is no question in my mind that there is an underlying race between the members of the Frontline to chase that title," said Tenay. "Samoa Joe was a dominant champion and deserves rematches. A.J. Styles has that deep, personal grudge with Sting. Rhino is also a former champion and has the most experience. One has to wonder if jealousy among these three and others will eventually rear its ugly head."

There's also an X-factor: Jeff Jarrett. His recent comeback has been nothing short of inspirational, but would it sit well with the Frontline if he, too, joined the championship race? Clearly, his recent, self-appointed mission as founder of TNA appears to be to protect the interests of TNA's younger generation, but if he re-entered the championship picture, would he be any better than the glory-hungry veterans that comprise

the Mafia? With all of these potential issues ready to explode, the Frontline could self-destruct at any time.

In fact, we've already witnessed infighting amongst Jay Lethal, Eric Young, and Shelley. With Consequences Creed teaming with Lethal, Chris Sabin with Shelley, and Shark Boy and Curry Man with Young, the formations of cliques within the Frontline threatens to erode the unity it needs to overcome the Main Event Mafia.

And what about the Main Event Mafia? Rumors of dissension within its ranks started almost as soon as the group formed, with most signs pointing to Sting as the major source of discontent.

Strangely, it was "The Stinger's" self-motivated stand against TNA's youth movement that initiated this entire war. Early interviews positioned him as the founder and leader of the group, but some suspect that things are not what they appear to be.

"I know Sting as well as anyone on this planet," professed wrestling legend



Despite such shows of unity, all is not well in the Frontline. Former TNA tag team champs Lethal and Creed share an obvious bond, but what exactly beholds them to either Petey Williams or Eric Young?



Both Nash (above) and Angle (below) have had difficulty keeping up with younger Frontline foes such as Creed. If MEM members break down physically, the group could be doomed to failure.



How Eric Bischoff ruined the NWO

BY KEVIN NASH

When Eric Bischoff came to Scott Hall, Hulk Hogan, and me to form the original New World Order, we knew it would be the biggest thing in the world. We were brash, we were powerful, and we were the cream of the crop. Nobody could stop our tight-knit group, and we became the greatest faction in wrestling history, bar none.


The problem was Bischoff always wanted to make things bigger. He just couldn't resist the desire to bring more and more people into our once-elite group.

Back then, I couldn't care less. More members meant more people to party with. But looking back, I realize we let ourselves get weak. Yeah, it was cool to have a workhorse like Syxx around, but what did Buff Bagwell ever do for us ... or Horace Hogan ... or Vincent ... or some chick from *Madtv*?

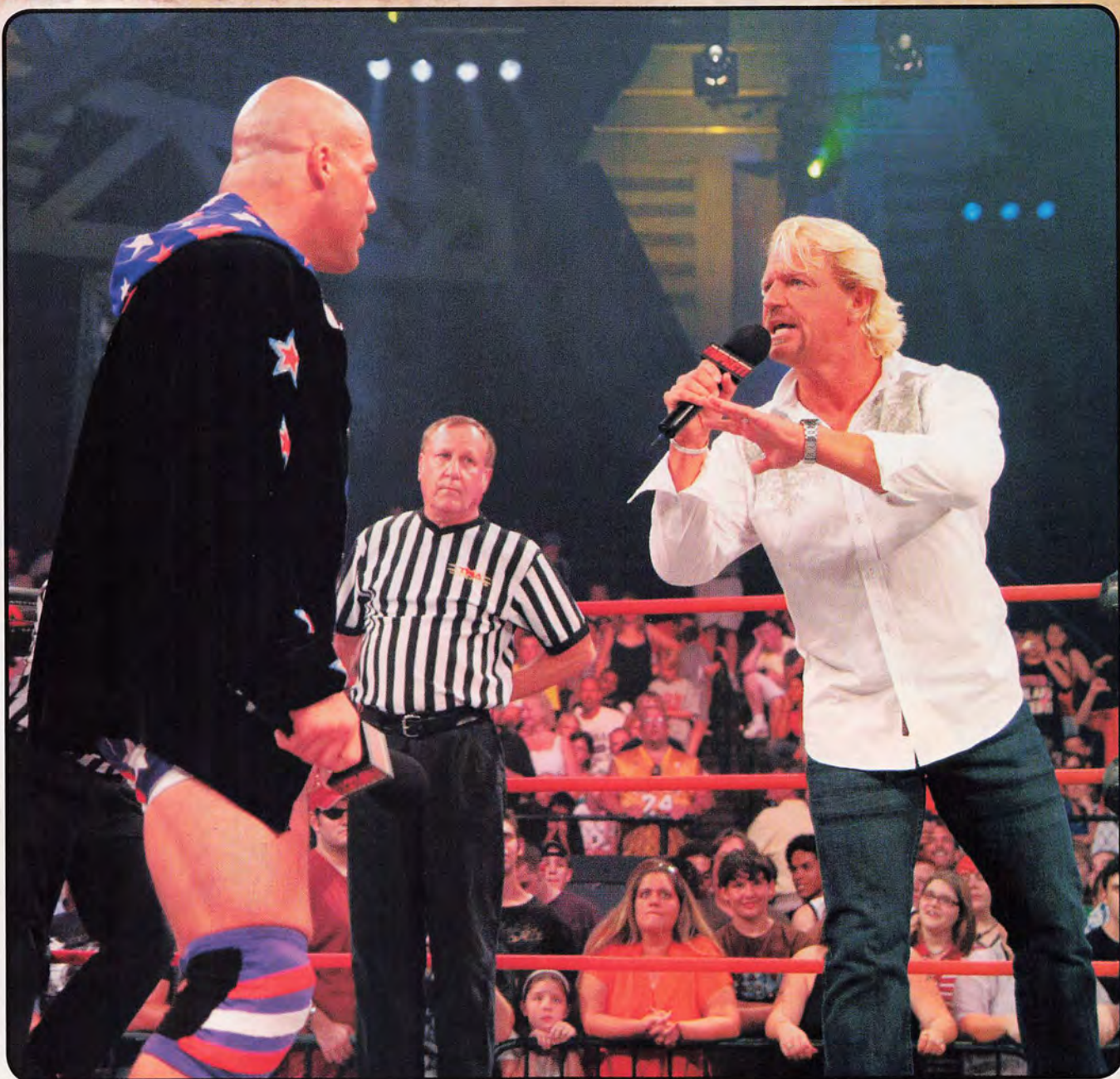
Bottom line: Less is more. Weak links only bring down the ship. The Main Event Mafia isn't trying to fill a membership quota. Every one of us is here because we are the best, and we all are committed to keeping it that way. Beggars and hangers-on need not apply this time out, boys.

Nikita Koloff. "I've tagged with him and fought against him, and I know what he's made of. Like me, he is full of passion, so when he feels strongly about something, he reacts accordingly. His actions against his younger peers may have been extreme, but they come from an honest desire to make things right in the sport today.

"The problem is that Sting is also too trusting," Koloff continued. "He always has been, which is why men like Ric Flair took advantage of him throughout his career. Once he made his feelings about men like A.J. Styles and Samoa Joe known, sharks like Booker T and Kurt Angle sidled up to him. They roped him into this group, this Mafia, and I believe he immediately regretted it."

A photograph of Eric Bischoff in a wrestling ring. He is wearing a black leather vest with red laces and a black shirt with a white logo. He has long, wavy grey hair and a goatee. He is standing in the ring, with his right arm raised in a 'rock on' hand gesture. The background shows a crowd of spectators and bright arena lights.

"Big Sexy" says less is more



In words, Jarrett stands behind TNA's younger generation of stars. But in practice, there's no telling how Jarrett will react if he gets the whiff of a TNA World title shot.

Koloff's suspicions have merit, especially considering Sting's absenteeism from the MEM's sadistic beatdowns of various Frontline members. It certainly appears as if Sting wants nothing to do with his faction's extreme antics. How long might it be before he wants nothing to do with his faction at all?

"My friend knows that his time in wrestling is nearing its end," Koloff said. "I truly believe in my heart that he wants to go out like a hero, not a thug. He can rise above all this, and I hope that he does."

The Main Event Mafia's potential problems actually go far beyond its leader. Kevin

Nash is infamous for playing those close to him against one another for his own benefit. Booker T has shown loyalty to no one but his beloved wife, Sharmell, throughout his career. Kurt Angle's enormous ego has destroyed his own family. And it has also caused some tension with Sting, as both had to be separated on *Impact* and at *Against All Odds*. Scott Steiner, the group's designated "muscle," is a former World champion who craves the spotlight just like his teammates. "Big Poppa Pump's" short fuse is legendary—his patience nonexistent. Any bets on how long it'll be until something ticks him off in a major way?

Of course, as much as nobody wants to admit it, age is another factor in the Mafia's ability to withstand the Frontline. Angle is always one move away from another major neck injury. Steiner and Nash are showing the vestiges of a career spent knocking heads in the ring. Should any members of the MEM break down physically, fingers will be pointed and the fallout will be tumultuous.

With all this in mind, it is easy to see this entire conflict between the Frontline and the Main Event Mafia may end up only serving as the prelude to a bigger war yet to come. □

IS FINIA SAB



Photo by Duane Long

OTAGING HIS MANIA HOPES?

John Cena could have waited a few more months and not rushed back from his latest serious injury. He could have held off on pursuing the WWE World title. And he could have steered clear of so many high-profile feuds so soon. Could have, and *should have*

BY DAVE LENKER

THERE WAS A time not so long ago that no one inside WWE would acknowledge the kind of strange phenomenon that has engulfed John Cena for the past half-decade. It used to be—and not just in WWE—that all the good guys in wrestling were universally beloved and all the bad guys were despised. Things were black, and things were white, but never would you see a shade of gray.

At least that's what the promotions would have you believe.

Think Vince McMahon would have ever acknowledged during the heyday of "Hulkamania" that some WWF fans despised "The Hulkster"? Even if a few thousand people at a live event were booing him, he was cheered and deified by all as far as the company was concerned.

But since "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin redefined the concept of a fan favorite a decade ago, things haven't been so simple. We see a lot of different shades of gray.

Cena is arguably the number-one fan favorite in the game today and yet a very vocal (and not so tiny) minority just won't get behind him. Cena, however, insists he figuratively made peace with these people years ago. He even started to acknowledge them ... with a smile, no less.

"They can love me, they can hate me, they can come down somewhere in between," he reaffirmed as if repeating carefully rehearsed lines recently. "We're still in a free country, remember."

But we wonder ...

On some level that he doesn't want to acknowledge or doesn't even realize is there at all, does it still eat at him?

Does he lay in bed some nights and wonder, What will it take for them to believe in me and support me? What else is there that I can possibly do?

We don't know the answer to that. Perhaps certain fans have just gotten so into the habit of booing Cena that they



Even after coming back early from a very serious injury, John Cena has not avoided any challengers. Whether it's Kane (above), Edge (below), or Randy Orton (above right), "The Champ" has had no reservations about taking on the biggest and best WWE has to offer.



Photo by Duane Long

don't even realize why they started to do it in the first place. Maybe they think it's a cool thing to do. It's a complicated debate for another time.

We're here to present evidence that, yes, it just might still bother him quite a bit and might even be affecting his otherwise remarkably good judgment.

We go back to October 1, 2007, to begin to present our case. Using a simple hiptoss on Ken Kennedy, Cena tore his pectoralis major muscle completely off the bone. Surgery followed the next day. Seven to 12 months of rigorous, exhausting rehab were supposed to follow that. Cena, not happy about having the longest WWE title reign in nearly two full decades ended by a freak injury, opted for less than four months instead. He somehow kept his return as the last man into the 2008 Royal Rumble at Madison Square Garden a secret and even won the event. But he took his WWE title shot against Randy Orton at No Way Out instead of at WrestleMania 24 and failed to recapture the gold. Failed in a triple threat showdown at WM 24, also. Same deal for a fatal four-way at Backlash a month later.

Four months later, a herniated disk in his neck put him back on the long-term injury list. Once again, he had his own definition of long-term injury. He obliterated all the momentum Chris Jericho had amassed when he beat him for the World title at Survivor Series. Three months on the shelf was enough for him this time. That's all that "indefinitely" ended up being.

"Cena Is Doing The Right Thing"

So what do you think about all this? We wanted to find out, so with us being the most unscientific of pollsters, we did our best to choose more than 300 subscribers to this very publication at random and telephone them to find out if they (you) believed that John Cena adopted the right approach in going all-out from the start in his latest comeback.

The verdict: An astounding 84.8 percent of you said he did, even some of you who confessed to not being big Cena fans.

"Without a doubt, Cena is doing the right thing," opined Jack Garron of Bristol, Pennsylvania, speaking for that overwhelming majority. "The T-shirt says it all. Hustle, loyalty, and respect are the words that mean the most to him. I can tell that every time I watch him. He's the best champion WWE has had since I started watching wrestling. Besides all that, it's intensity that really makes him so great. If he doesn't have that intensity, he doesn't win."

A fair point, Jack. Ask athletes competing in any sport and they'll likely tell you that if you're going to be tentative, you might as well not even bother to show up. Try to compensate physically for an injury or weakness in one part of your body and you'll probably injure another part of your body, one on which you're placing too much additional and unnatural strain.

As for the dissenters ...

"If you don't let your body heal completely, it's going to catch up to you eventually," offered Scott McHugh of La Jolla, California. "He might have got by on adrenaline for a while—I don't know. What would have been the harm in him waiting until the Royal Rumble to come back? It would have still given him a chance to make it back in good shape by WrestleMania 25. I think it's ego, and I bet he ends up hurt again by the end of this year. I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up shortening his career by doing things this way, too."

—Dave Lenker

Sounds like a great comeback story—er, stories really—and it was. Up to now. Mostly.

Not that looking too far ahead on a WWE schedule that never really lets up is usually a smart move, but did Cena have one eye on WrestleMania 25 when he signed on the dotted line for Survivor Series?

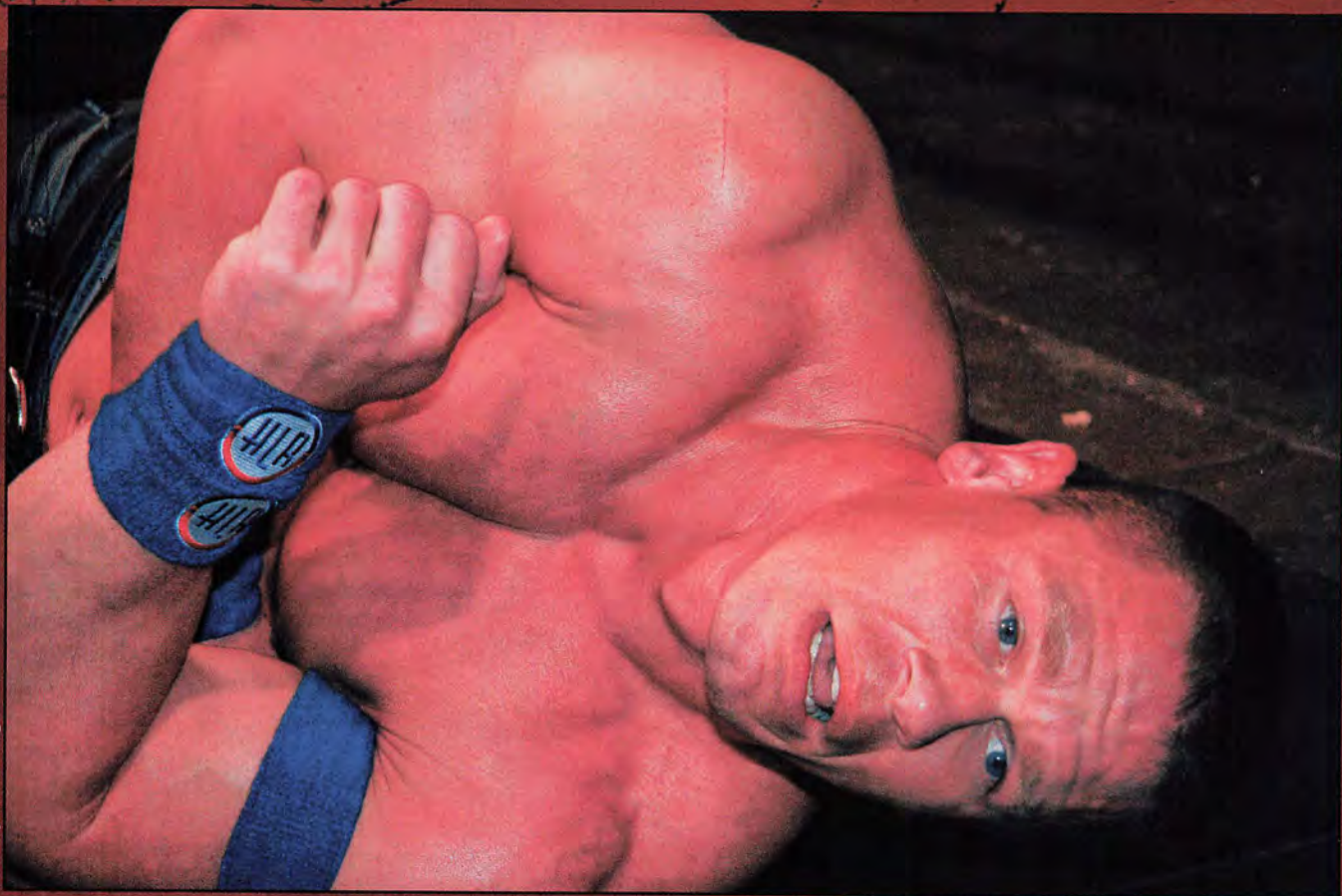
He should have, but hey, too late now.

Because winning the World title at that point may have been the last thing he needed or should have wanted.

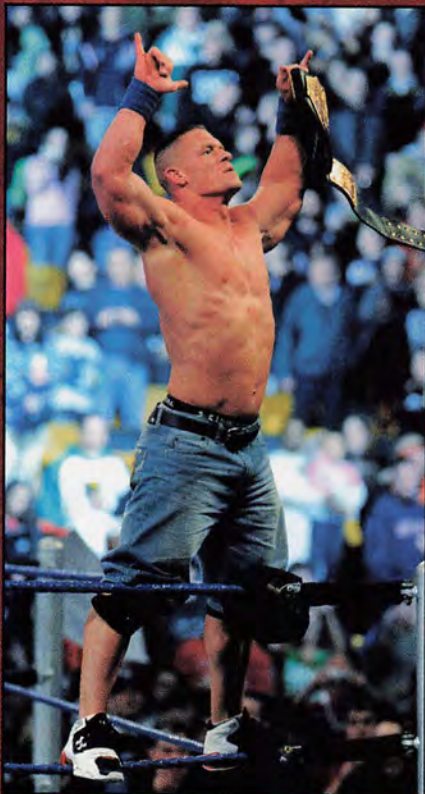
Go ahead, look at what big John and all the trouble his hustle, loyalty, and respect have gotten him into in just the past few months. A few ping-pong, rattling, and clunking noises seemed to be emanating from an engine that wasn't necessarily firing just right to begin with as Cena merged his vehicle onto the very long, winding, and bumpy road to WrestleMania 25 in Houston, Texas. If you don't take the time to tend to them right away, those annoying little noises can turn into a muffler falling off, brakes failing, and a transmission melting down before you know it. If you insist on pushing the car harder and



Cena vs. Jericho



Despite the pain and suffering Cena puts himself through (above), he seems to find a sense of redemption in his victories. Whether or not he does it entirely for those fans who doubt him, it's hard to say he doesn't enjoy soaking in the admiration of those who love him (below).



faster instead of getting the necessary repairs, big trouble and big repair bills are almost assuredly ahead. It's just a matter of when.

Despite Y2J's problems with Stephanie McMahon, and now Mickey Rourke, he hasn't gone away. The Jericho-Cena feud didn't end at Survivor Series or when Jericho tapped out to Cena's STF at Armageddon in December. Chris still wants that World title back, and if you haven't paid attention to the WWE house show circuit of late, well, you've missed some brutal and stellar cage bouts that he and Cena have had. They had a particularly exciting showdown at Madison Square Garden just a couple of months ago. Those always take a physical toll.

JBL weaseled his way into the World title picture and stole a shot at the gold at the Royal Rumble. He probably would have won the title had Shawn Michaels' loyalties not caused him so much inner turmoil.

With Michaels working for JBL, Cena wasn't sure where exactly he stood with the "Heartbreak Kid," except when he was being waffled by Sweet Chin Music or having his vulnerable neck twisted

this way and that by Michaels' modified STF on a cold night in January.

Let's not forget about his tensions with the Legacy. Cena allowed himself to get pulled into a feud with that unsettled, but still-dangerous, group as he and Randy Orton began to renew their rivalry. That started back in August, when he and Batista defeated Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes and reigned briefly as WWE World tag team champions. And Orton had all the momentum he could want on his side after winning the 2009 Royal Rumble.

That's enough to handle for even a 100-percent-healthy world champion in his physical prime. Cena is in the middle of his physical prime age-wise, no doubt, but if you think you've noticed him still looking a little unsure of himself, maybe ever so slightly tentative, congratulations: You've been watching closely, and your eyes are not lying to you. It was pretty obvious at Survivor Series and in the weeks immediately thereafter that the neck injury was still bothering Cena to some extent. That he wrestled at such a high level and, more importantly, so successfully is a testament to his



After taking Chris Jericho's title at Survivor Series 2008, Cena had to face Y2J's constant bloviating about being the real champ (below). But Cena has taken the verbal abuse and dished out some physical abuse (above) in return.



Photo by Duane Long

Any athlete that loves what he does will tell you physical pain is a second thought when it comes to winning. But after serious injury followed serious injury, the look on Cena's face after each match tells the story. As much as "The Champ" loves what he does, his body can only take so much abuse.

physical and mental toughness. Still ... returning so quickly (too quickly?) from major injuries twice in the span of less than a year might not have been so advisable. It might have been downright foolish.

"I don't want to give anything away," one top WWE wrestler told **THE WRESTLER** on condition of anonymity. "But there are little things you notice when you watch him closely where you can see weakness. With the schedule he's been keeping, his body just can't heal completely. That sets him up perfectly to be had at WrestleMania, if not before."

It's a cruel business. Whether it's because he feels like he has something to prove to those fans who refuse to cheer him or because he's just naturally selfless and wants to give all WWE fans the best show possible—a show that includes him giving his all every night—he could end up getting the worst consequences from it all: a very banged up body by the time he makes it to 'Mania, if he makes to 'Mania in any shape to compete at all.

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Sept. 1983: Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Brisco, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

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Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Destruction Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbow! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Schultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's

Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Am's: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Aug. 1989 (Special Issue): Supercard Sunday! Exclusive Coverage Of WrestleMania V And Clash Of Champions VI. Also: Kerry-Embry, Randy Savage, Great Muta, Ted DiBiase, Teddy Long.

Oct. 1989: No Holds Barred! Hogan & Beefcake vs. Savage & Zeus: An Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Eric Embry, Four Horsemen, Teddy Long, Hayes-Luger, Art Barr, Billy Jack Haynes.

Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.

March 1990: Funk-Flair: "I Quit!"—One War Ends, Two More Begin. Also: Nikita Koloff, Survivor Series, Steiners, Hogan-Zeus, Jim Cornette.

April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.

July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.

Aug. 1990: Hogan-Warrior II: You Can Make It Happen. Also: Eric Embry, Demolition, Doom, Larry Zbyszko.

Sept. 1990: The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out! Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan. Also: Billy Jack Haynes, Lex Luger, Doom-Steiners, Tugboat, Kerry-Borne.

Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.

Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.

March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.

April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

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Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.

Jan. 1992: The LOD's Championship Catastrophe: Overpowered By The Natural Disasters. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Mr. Hughes, Jake Roberts, Ronnie Gossett.

Feb. 1992: Shocking WWF Report: McMahon Offers Bounty On Flair—Will Vince Pay The Piper? Also: Ron Simmons, Tito Santana, Bob Backlund, R. Steiner-Abdullah.

March 1992: After Survivor Series & Tuesday In Texas: Has The WWF Title Suffered Irreparable Damage? Also: Brian Pillman, Anderson & Bruiser, Rude-Sting, Mountie-Hart, Jeff Jarrett.

April 1992: After A Year Of Tragedy & Turmoil: The Magic Is Back In WCW! Also: Chris Candido, Paul Orndorff, Lady X, Paul Bearer, Hennig & Flair, Michaels & Jannetty.

Dec. 1992: He's Baaaaaack! Jake Roberts Slithers Into WCW. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, Michaels-Martel, Gilberts-Rock 'n' Rolls.

June 1992: In Ric Flair's High-Stakes Championship Game, Hulk Hogan & Sid Justice Are Mere Pawns. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Ultimate Warrior, Vinnie Vegas, WCW titles, Koko B. Ware.

July 1992: "Number Two Just Won't Do": For Rick Rude, The U.S. Belt Means Failure. Also: Madusa, Gorilla Monsoon,

LOD, Nurse Vanessa, Greg Valentine, Sabu.

Aug. 1992: The Ultimate Warrior: WrestleMania's Accidental Hero. Also: Bunkhouse matches, Undertaker-Roberts, Sting, JYD, Rob Van Dam.

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Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.

March 1993 (Special Edition): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E., Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.

April 1993 What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.

May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

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Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharris, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.

Jan. 1995: Our Holiday Wish List For 1995. Also: Johnny B. Badd, DiBiase-Tatanka, Bob Backlund, PG-13, Hacksaw Duggan.

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Oct. 1995: President Backlund? Also: Steiners, Austin & Pillman, Miss Texas, Gordon Solie.

Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.

Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also:

Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.

Feb. 1997: **Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them!** Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kevin Nash.

Nov. 1997: **10-Year Grudge! Lex Luger's Career Ruined By J.J. Dillon?** Also: Shawn-Bret, Jeff Jarrett, H-Unter Hearst Helmsley, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn.

Hol. 1997: **First Owen ... Then 'Taker ... Then Hogan: Who's Gonna Go Next?** Also: Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dean Malenko.

April 1998: **"We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success?** Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

June 1998: **Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here!** Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

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Aug. 1998: **We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin.** Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

Sept. 1998 (Special Issue): **WWF Midyear Report.** Also: Nash-Hogan, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg, Antonio Inoki.

Oct. 1998: **The Mother Of All Pay-Per-Views! A WWF-WCW Supercard Is No Longer Just Talk!** Also: Sable, Undertaker, Randy Savage, Sabu & Van Dam.

Nov. 1998: **Demons Be Damned! Sting Makes The Giant See Red!** Also: McMahon-Dude, Jarrett-Blackman, Melanie Pillman, Rey Mysterio Jr.

Dec. 1998 (Special Issue): **WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff!** Also: ECW midyear report, Ric Flair, Kane.

Hol. 1998: **"Quit, Mick!" A Desperate Plea From A Distraught Wife.** Also: Chris Jericho, Jason Sensation, wrestlers vs. celebrities, hardcore war.

Jan. 1999: **Stone-Cold's Personal Survivor Series.** Also: Rock-HHH, NWA, Bret Hart, Howard Finkel, three-way title matches.

Feb. 1999: **Hot Rocks! The Anger That Drives Shamrock & The Rock.** Also: McMahon-Austin, Spike Dudley, Eric Bischoff, Perry Saturn.

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May 2000: **StePHONY: The Most Mistrusted McMahon Of All!** Also: Harlem Heat & Midnight, David & Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Rhino.

June 2000 (Special Issue): **The Rock: No. 1 On The Jabroni Hit List!** Also: Awesome-Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Vampiro, federation jumpers, book of lists.

July 2000: **Tori/Torrie, What's The Story? How They Rank In 10 Crucial Categories.** Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

Aug. 2000: **We're Con-Vinced! This Attack Saved The WWF!** Also: Lex Luger, Radicals, Sandman & Rhino, Cyrus.

Sept. 2000 (Special Issue): **WWF Mid-Year Report.** Also: Mike Awesome, Nova & Chetti, Paul Wight, Chyna, Dr. Sam Sheppard.

Oct. 2000: **Is Chyna Robbing Eddie Of His Latino Heat?** Also: Abbott-Steiner, Scotty Too Hotty, Rob Van Dam, David Flair.

Nov. 2000: **Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK.** Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

Dec. 2000 (Special Issue): **WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff!** Also: Goldberg-Triple-H, Daffney, Christian & Edge, Jeff Peterson. (ALL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH THE JANUARY 2001 ISSUE)

Jan. 2001: **WWF Brat-titude! Does Steph Always Get Her Way? Not On Your Life!** Also: Lance Storm, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Steve Corino, Steve Blackman, Torrie Wilson.

March 2001: **Triple-H & The Rock: 10 Reasons They Should Trust Each Other ... 10 Reasons They Should Not!** Also: Scott Steiner, Chris Candido, Rob Van Dam, McMahon-ECW, Steven Richards, WCW factions.

May 2001: **Do Anything You Want, Stone-Cold: We Can't Hate You.** Also: Kronik, Rikishi, Steve Corino, Goldberg, Edge & Christian, Kane.

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Sept. 2001: **The Rock's Choice: Honor Over Glory!** Also: WrestleMania X-Seven, Undertaker-Triple-H, Shane-WCW, TCL II, Scott Hall, Vince McMahon, Chris Jericho.

Nov. 2001: **Goldberg! Da Man Who Could Make Or Break Wrestling!** Also: Dudleys, Steve Corino, Chris Benoit, Dusty Rhodes, Lita, WWF top tier.

Jan. 2002: **Can The Rock Handle The Unrelenting Pressure Of Fame?** Also: RVD, Paul Heyman, Terry Gordy, Flash-Jericho, Tajiri-Tazz, WWF-Alliance.

March 2002: **Outsiders Looking In! Hall & Nash Take Aim At The WWF!** Also: Ivory, Austin-Angle, Christian-Edge, what's ahead in '02.

May 2002: **Ric Flair: 10 Reasons He Terrifies Vince McMahon.** Also: Undertaker, Jeff Hardy, Survivor Series, S.A.T., report cards.

July 2002: **Hail The NWO ... But Don't Forget The N-W-Woest!** Also: Edge, Billy & Chuck, Leviathan, Jericho-Flair, Goldust.

Sept. 2002: **What's Left? Hulk Hogan's Five Remaining Tasks.** Also: Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Rey Mysterio Jr., Jeff Peterson, WWF draft.

Nov. 2002: **Who's Next? The Stars That Could Replace Stone-Cold.** Also: Torrie Wilson, Davey Boy Smith, Ken Shamrock, Funk-Abdullah-Rhodes-Sullivan, WWF shockers, indy roulette.

Jan. 2003: **War Games! WWE Is Out Of Control ... And Vinnie Mac Loves It!** Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., A.J. Styles, Rikishi-Gangrel, The Rock, Christian.

March 2003: **The WrestleMania XIX We**

Want To See! Also: Terry Funk, Rey Mysterio Jr., Nidia, NWA-TNA, what's ahead in '03.

May 2003: **A Permanent Replacement For The Rock? Book It!** Also: Smackdown, Joanie & Syxx-Pac, Raw report cards, Shawn Michaels, Victoria.

July 2003: **In Tune With Steve Austin—A Comprehensive Guide To Stone-Cold's Red-Hot Comeback.** Also: Kurt Angle, Amazing Red, The Sheik, Bill DeMott, Al Snow, Ric Flair.

Sept. 2003: **Goldberg's Golden Road To WWE.** Also: Hardys, Chance Beckett, Kevin Nash, WrestleMania "B" card, Playboy-WWE.

Nov. 2003: **The Women Of Wrestling—Do We Expect Too Much From Their Bodies?** Also: A.J. Styles, Freddie Blassie, Goldberg, Stacy Keibler, evolution of wrestling.

Jan. 2004: **No Fear! Ask Angle ... He's Never Been Hurt A Day In His Life!** Also: Punk-Raven, Orton-Guerrero-Rock, TNA vs. WWE, Mankind, Hall of Fame.

March 2004: **McMahon vs. McWoman: How Vince vs. Stephanie Nearly Ruined WWE!** Also: Flair & Dusty, Eric Angle, Jeff Jarrett, Shannon Moore, what's ahead in '04.

May 2004: **Who's Got The Edge? The Inside Story Of The Raw-Smackdown Bidding War!** Also: Bret Hart, Sumie Sakai, Steiner-Stacy, Smackdown report cards.

July 2004: **Stop Right There! RVD Won't Let The Young Studs Pass Him By!** Also: Jonny Fairplay, Walters-Xavier, HHH-HBK.

Oct. 2004: **Austin, Lesnar, Goldberg: We Know Who'll Be Back First.** Also: A.J. Styles, Eugene, Rene Dupree, mid-year report.

Jan. 2005: **Evolving Beyond Evolution: It's Time For Randy Orton To Be A Man!** Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., Kane-Lita, Ron Killings, La Resistance, Eugene-Helmsley, Trish-Victoria, Kurt Angle, WWE mid-carders.

April 2005: **PPV Revolution: How Taboo Tuesday & Victory Road Changed Wrestling Forever.** Also: Eddie Guerrero, Justin Liger, Edge-Benoit, Kane-Snitsky, TNA vs. ROH, Heyman & Heidenreich, Charlie Haas, WWE pin slips.

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Substitute choice _____

THE WRESTLING ANALYST



THE "HEARTBREAK KID" SHAWN MICHAELS

Years Pro: 24

Size: 6'1", 225

"PWI 500" Listings: 2008—7
2007—6
2006—9
2005—34
2004—9
2003—32
1998—49
1997—18
1996—1
1995—2
1994—5
1993—3
1992—16
1991—37

Titles: AWA World tag team (three times)
NWA Central States tag team
AWA Southern tag team (two times)
Texas Wrestling Alliance heavyweight
Texas All-Star tag team (two times)
WWF heavyweight (three times)
WWF European
WWF Intercontinental (three times)
WWF/E World tag team (four times)
WWE World

PWI Awards: Match of the Year (1993, '94, '95, '96,
2004, '05, '06, '07, '08)
Most Popular Wrestler of the Year
(1995, '96)
Feud of the Year (2008)

[THE NUMBERS] ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Offense (9.0): It's an oft-repeated cliché that the best offense is a good defense. A somewhat less common but no less true statement applies to Shawn Michaels: The best offense is a swift, slobberknocking superkick to your opponent's jaw. That's not to say that Sweet Chin Music is the only weapon in Michaels' formidable arsenal; it just happens to be the *coup de grâce*. Michaels knows a million ways to dish out the hurt, from the basic (a trusty eye-gouge) to the sublime (a moonsault from the top turnbuckle). You don't become the first-ever WWE Grand Slam champion by taking it easy on your opponents.

Defense (8.5): If Michaels has one flaw in his in-ring technique—and some would argue that he doesn't—it's that he takes too many risks that don't always pan out. An ill-timed leap from the top rope has jeopardized Michaels' chances in more than one match. His off-the-mark springboard moonsault at WrestleMania 24 was nearly his undoing, as he crashed ribs-first into the announcers' table (alas, he still managed to send Ric Flair into retirement). Quick-thinking opponents have often capitalized on "The Showstopper's" mistakes, rare as they may be. But Michaels' willingness to take enormous risks is also part of what makes him "The Showstopper" in the first place.

Experience (10.0): Hardly anyone in professional wrestling today has the wealth of experience and knowledge Shawn Michaels does. Only The Undertaker rivals him in terms of longevity in WWE (both men competed on the inaugural edition of Raw, and remain cornerstones of WWE programming). Michaels has gone to battle with, and usually defeated, every top competitor in the business. From Steve Austin to Zeus, and in one of wrestling's most emotional battles, Ric Flair. From his early years as a tag team star in the AWA, to his unprecedented title reigns in WWE, "Mr. WrestleMania" has done it all.

Conditioning (9.0): Michaels has always been a physical underdog in a world populated by giants, but he has conquered them all. He is one of those rare physical specimens whose body seems perfectly suited to his craft—he has the speed to strike like a cobra, enough strength to pack a serious wallop, and an aerodynamic form that seems designed to fly from great heights. The only crack in his armor is his well-known back problem, which sidelined him for several years and remains a target for opponents.

Stamina (10.0): Shawn Michaels is professional wrestling's equivalent of the Energizer Bunny—he just keeps going and going and going. His epic Iron Man match with Bret Hart at WrestleMania XII cemented his

Photo by Duane Long



① Despite giving up height and weight to bigger opponents such as Kane, Michaels' mat acumen usually breaks larger men down to size and negates any disadvantage.

reputation as a stellar athlete with seemingly infinite reserves of energy. Michaels has outlasted 29 other competitors in the Royal Rumble, surviving from the opening bell to the final elimination, a herculean feat (only accomplished by one other man, Chris Benoit). Though he's reaching the age when many of his peers hang up the boots for good, he shows no signs of slowing down in the ring. The man is a machine.

Power (8.5): Michaels has often been outmuscled, but has only rarely been outfoxed. Though he is obviously no slouch in the gym, HBK has never relied on brute strength in the ring. Michaels learned a long time ago that any Goliath can be beaten if David knows how to use his slingshot. Michaels' slingshot, as it were, is a combination of quickness, ruthlessness, and supreme ring savvy.

Speed (9.0): Though 24 years of grueling competition will slow any man down, Michaels remains remarkably quick in the ring, especially when it counts the most. He can still unleash a superkick faster than Billy the Kid could unholster a revolver. Though Michaels is no longer as sprightly as he was in his Rockers days, he can still set a pace in the ring few opponents can match.

Ability to Absorb Punishment (9.5): Anyone who saw Michaels' epic Hell in a Cell bloodbath against the Undertaker at 1997's Badd Blood will recall the sheer brutality HBK endured. The Undertaker seemed hell-bent on destroying Michaels, who nonetheless struggled to his feet after every devastating assault. That was just one of many matches during which Michaels, clearly in agony, continued to fight. Had the referee not called a halt to his match against Chris Jericho at The Great American Bash, there's no telling how much blood HBK would have lost. To Michaels, "quit" is the nastiest four-letter word of all.

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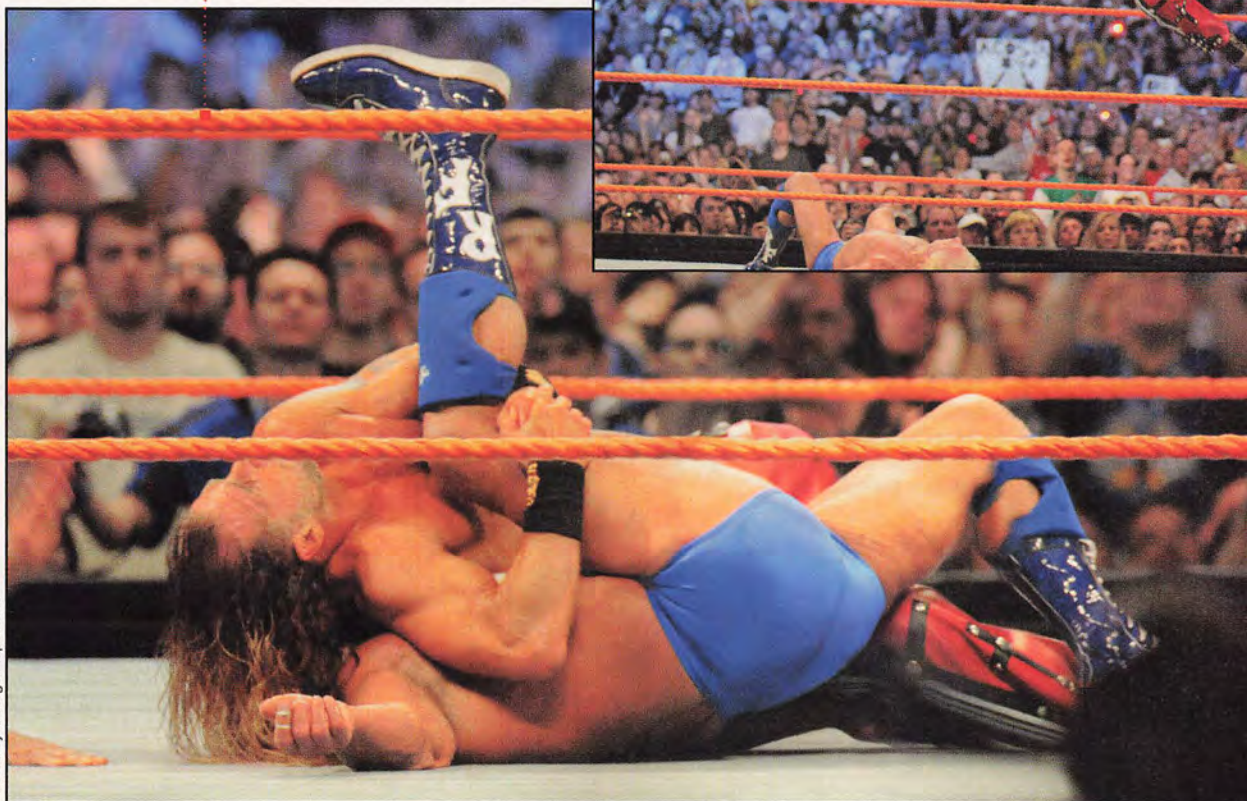
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- ② Michaels is often at his showstopping best on the big stage. At WrestleMania 24, he put his willingness to take risks on full display against Ric Flair (right), and scored a pinfall victory that sent the "Nature Boy" into retirement (below).



Photos by George Napolitano



- ③ While Michaels' Sweet Chin Music is a feared and lethal finisher, wrestlers who focus exclusively on avoiding it leave themselves at a disadvantage when facing HBK. His experience and ability allow him to pull many effective maneuvers from his arsenal.

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- ④ Despite absorbing tremendous punishment at the hands of Chris Jericho at The Great American Bash (above), Michaels' ability to withstand abuse allowed him to rally with a modified crossface later in the match (right).



[THE ANALYSIS]

Repertoire: Shawn Michaels has competed in practically every type of match imaginable, against every style of opponent. Whether in the legendary ladder match against Razor Ramon, the first-ever Hell in a Cell, the grueling Iron Man match, or the ever-dangerous Royal Rumble, Michaels has an uncanny knack to adapt to any situation. Though he may not boast the largest arsenal of submission holds or suplexes, what he does boast is a preternatural instinct for gaining the upper hand.

Strengths: Where to begin? Shawn Michaels is quite simply one of the greatest pro wrestlers of the past half-century. Whether in a tag team or in singles competition, whether main-eventing WrestleMania or working a house show, Michaels has built his reputation on first-rate ring work. Perhaps Michaels' greatest strength, however, is his seemingly unrelenting desire to be the very best. Michaels is great because he won't let himself be anything less.

Weaknesses: Of the seven deadly sins, the one Michaels should be most worried about is pride. Michaels' pride may one day be his undoing. Though a financially devastated Michaels recently had to swallow his pride by becoming an employee of

JBL, history has shown that Michaels' hubris frequently trumps his common sense. Though he still has a lot of fight left in him, let's hope his pride doesn't write a check that his body can't cash.

Defining Career Moment: Picking a single moment as the pinnacle of Michaels' career is a task akin to naming the best song by The Beatles—there are just too many greats to choose from. Certainly, the Montreal Screwjob gave Michaels a certain infamy. And his utterance of "I'm sorry, I love you," before playing a little Sweet Chin Music for Ric Flair's retirement was a moment that will resonate with fans for decades. But perhaps the most defining moment of HBK's career was his first world title victory, during which the then-commentating Vince McMahon famously said: "The boyhood dream has come true for Shawn Michaels."

Future: Michaels, now 43, has himself said he doesn't know how many years he can continue to wrestle. Even if he were to retire tomorrow, he would leave behind a legacy as one of wrestling's all-time greats. But Michaels still has that hungry look in his eyes, the look that says his greatest moments may still be yet to come. The "Heartbreak Kid" has some big matches left in him, and you can be sure that they'll be showstoppers. □

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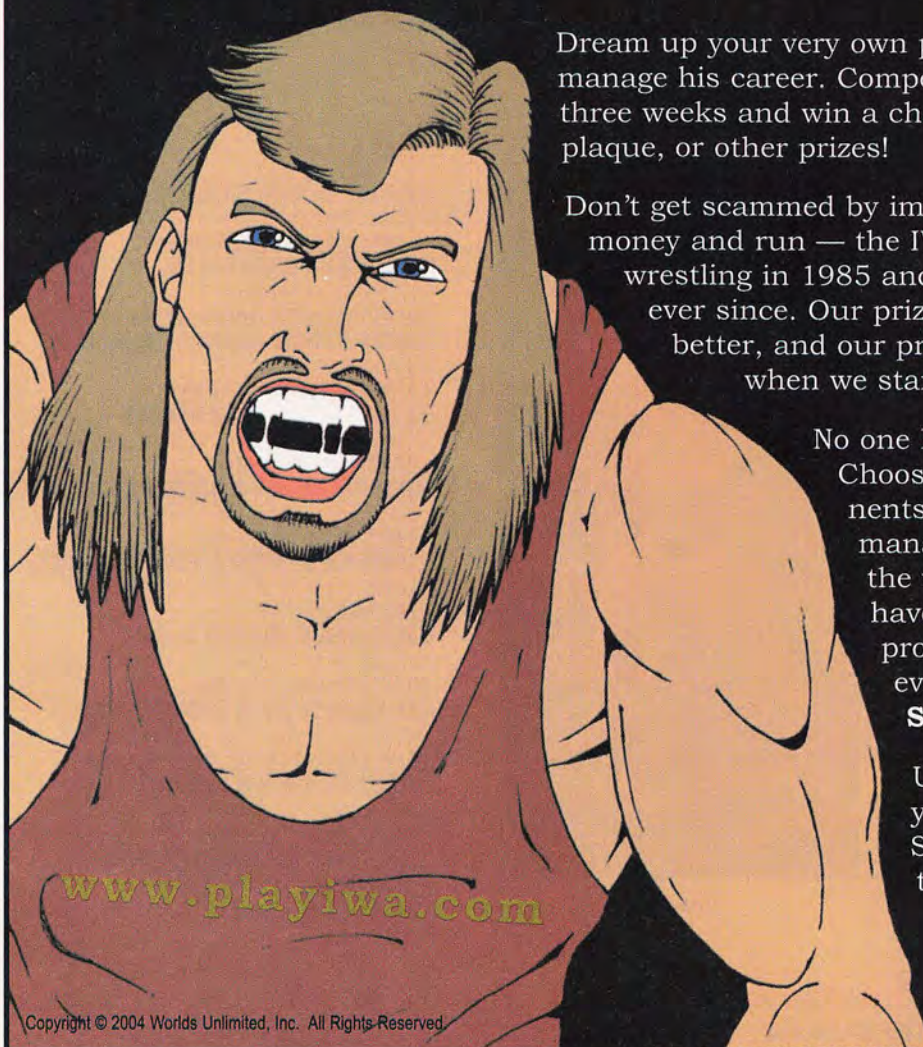
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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Turnbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Wrist lock |

SET-UP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricanrana | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

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WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 **JOHN CENA**
240, West Newbury, MA
(1) WWE World champion
- 2 **STING**
255, Venice Beach, CA
(2) TNA World champion
- 3 **EDGE**
250, Toronto, Ontario
(3) WWE heavyweight champion
- 4 **NIGEL McGUINNESS**
220, London, England
(8) Ring of Honor champion
- 5 **JACK SWAGGER**
285, Perry, OK
(-) ECW champion
- 6 **KENSUKE SASAKI**
254, Fukuoka, Japan
(7) GHC heavyweight champion
- 7 **RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(-) No. 1 contender: WWE World title
- 8 **BLUE DEMON JR.**
228, Mexico City, Mexico
(-) NWA champion
- 9 **TRIPLE-H**
255, Greenwich, CT
(4) No. 1 contender: WWE title
- 10 **HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
231, Gifu, Japan
(-) IWGP champion



Triple-H

TAG TEAMS

- 1 **THE MIZ & JOHN MORRISON**
Combined weight: 414 pounds
(4) WWE World tag team champions
- 2 **CARLITO & PRIMO COLON**
Combined weight: 438 pounds
(2) WWE heavyweight tag team champions
- 3 **JAMES STORM & ROBERT ROODE**
Combined weight: 495 pounds
(1) TNA World tag team champions
- 4 **KEVIN STEEN & EL GENERICO**
Combined weight: 400 pounds
(7) ROH tag team champions
- 5 **BROTHER DEVON & BROTHER RAY**
Combined weight: 560 pounds
(-) IWGP tag team champions
- 6 **RODERICK STRONG & ERICK STEVENS**
Combined weight: 447 pounds
(-) FIP tag team champions
- 7 **TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI**
Combined weight: 454 pounds
(5) AJPW tag team champions
- 8 **TED DiBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES**
Combined weight: 454 pounds
(8) No. 1 contenders: WWE World tag team title
- 9 **RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER**
Combined weight: 560 pounds
(10) NWA tag team champions
- 10 **TYLER REIKS & JOHNNY CURTIS**
Combined weight: 450 pounds
(-) FCW tag team champions

WWE RAW

World Champion:

- JOHN CENA**
(C) 240, West Newbury, MA
- 1—**RANDY ORTON**
(3) 245, St. Louis, MO
 - 2—**CHRIS JERICHO**
(1) 226, Manhasset, NY
 - 3—**REY MYSTERIO JR.**
(8) 175, San Diego, CA
 - 4—**KANE**
(9) 323, Parts Unknown
 - 5—**KOFI KINGSTON**
(10) 225, Jamaica
 - 6—**MIKE KNOX**
(-) 293, Phoenix, AZ
 - 7—**C.M. PUNK**
(7) 222, Chicago, IL
 - 8—**SHAWN MICHAELS**
(5) 225, San Antonio, TX
 - 9—**JOHN B. LAYFIELD**
(6) 290, New York, NY
 - 10—**WILLIAM REGAL**
(4) 240, Blackpool, England

SMACKDOWN

WWE Champion:

- EDGE**
(C) 250, Toronto, Ontario
- 1—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(4) 299, Death Valley, CA
 - 2—**TRIPLE-H**
(1) 255, Greenwich, CT
 - 3—**JEFF HARDY**
(3) 225, Cameron, NC
 - 4—**VLADIMIR KOZLOV**
(2) 302, Moscow, Russia
 - 5—**THE BIG SHOW**
(6) 441, Tampa, FL
 - 6—**SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(7) 248, Orangeburg, SC
 - 7—**THE GREAT KHALI**
(5) 420, Bombay, India
 - 8—**MATT HARDY**
(-) 213, Cameron, NC
 - 9—**R-TRUTH**
(8) 228, Charlotte, NC
 - 10—**UMAGA**
(-) 350, Samoa

ECW

Champion:

- JACK SWAGGER**
(3) 285, Perry, OK
- 1—**FINLAY**
(1) 233, Belfast, N. Ireland
 - 2—**MARK HENRY**
(2) 392, Silsbee, TX
 - 3—**BOOGEYMAN**
(-) 260, The Bottomless Pit
 - 4—**D.J. GABRIEL**
(-) 220, Berkshire, England
 - 5—**TOMMY DREAMER**
(4) 265, Yonkers, NY
 - 6—**JOHN MORRISON**
(9) 219, Los Angeles, CA
 - 7—**JAMIE NOBLE**
(-) 202, Hanover, WV
 - 8—**RICKY ORTIZ**
(7) 256, Paradise Valley, AZ
 - 9—**THE MIZ**
(-) 231, Cleveland, OH
 - 10—**PAUL BIRCHALL**
(-) 247, Chelsea, England

TNA

World Champion:

- STING**
(C) 255, Venice Beach, CA
- 1—**KURT ANGLE**
(2) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
 - 2—**BROTHER RAY**
(-) 290, New York, NY
 - 3—**BROTHER DEVON**
(-) 270, New York, NY
 - 4—**BOOKER T**
(4) 253, Houston, TX
 - 5—**HERNANDEZ**
(-) 285, Houston, TX
 - 6—**SCOTT STEINER**
(10) 275, Detroit, MI
 - 7—**ALEX SHELLEY**
(-) 215, Detroit, MI
 - 8—**A.J. STYLES**
(1) 215, Gainesville, GA
 - 9—**RHINO**
(9) 275, Detroit, MI
 - 10—**MATT MORGAN**
(-) 305, Fairfield, CT

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain title-holders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED FEBRUARY 10, 2009

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Jake Davis; 1—Hyjinx; 2—Shane Shadows; 3—Griffen; 4—Bob Keller; 5—Demolition Ax; 6—The Barbarian; 7—Gino Sammartino; 8—Robbie Paige; 9—Bill Bain; 10—Chris Cline.

FULL THROTTLE WRESTLING: Champion—The Searcher; 1—Damian Blade; 2—Scar; 3—Cowboy Bob Orton; 4—Curtis Payne; 5—Bryan James; 6—Keiji Shinzaki; 7—Xander Frost; 8—Ivan Stroganof; 9—Wapochoncho; 10—The Candyman.

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Christian York; 1—Ruckus; 2—The Bruiser; 3—Josh Daniels; 4—Adam Flash; 5—Cobian; 6—Sugarmask; 7—Dino Divine; 8—Stevie Richards; 9—Rhett Titus; 10—Sabian.

MAXIMUM WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Blake Albright; 1—Michael Barry; 2—Max McGuirk; 3—Tim Rockwell; 4—El Super Colibri; 5—Shane Morbid; 6—Jack Legacy; 7—Dustin Heritage; 8—Canadian Red Devil; 9—Justin Lee; 10—Jason Jones.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Ken Steel; 1—Sgt. Jim Nelson; 2—Scott Lee; 3—Damien James; 4—Eclipse; 5—Masked Superstar; 6—Ace England; 7—Kasper O'Neil; 8—Col. Spud Wade; 9—Dirty Yellow Rose; 10—Hillbilly Helbert.

NORTH SHORE WRESTLING: Champion—Jonny Idol; 1—Sonny Goodspeed; 2—Shane Sharpe; 3—Alex Arion; 4—Pizzazz; 5—Rocco Abruzzi; 6—Maverick Wild; 7—Sethoran; 8—Scott Reed; 9—Psycho; 10—Bob Evans.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Jason Blade; 1—Jalil Salaam; 2—Jerry Lawler; 3—Eddie Edwards; 4—Brian Anthony; 5—Big Daddy V; 6—Ron Zombie; 7—Gene Snitsky; 8—Rob Eckos; 9—Nunzio; 10—Hacksaw Jim Duggan.

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: Champion—Tommy Hawk; 1—Jimmy Jannetty; 2—Bobby Shields; 3—Shannon Moore; 4—Rich Myers; 5—Christian York; 6—Sheik Hunter Muhammed; 7—Brock Singleton; 8—Mark Bravura; 9—Leslie Leatherman; 10—Chris Cline.

PRO WRESTLING AMERICA: Champion—Jay Jaillette; 1—Davey Loomis; 2—Julian Young; 3—Cameron Mathews; 4—Robbie Ellis; 5—Captain Freedom; 6—Scott Vegas; 7—Jimmy Capone; 8—Johnny Primer; 9—Matt Rage; 10—Jesus Hernandez.

PRO WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—Shane Valentine; 1—Hyjinx; 2—Jey Graham; 3—Glen Osbourne; 4—Johnny Graham; 5—Shane Shadows; 6—Ian Jordan; 7—Sheriff Steele; 8—Jackpot; 9—Doink the Clown; 10—Joey Money.

SHOWTIME ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—Kid Kash; 1—Chase Stevens; 2—Flash Flanagan; 3—Arrick Andrews; 4—Marc Anthony; 5—T.J. Harley; 6—Jon Michael Worthington; 7—Rick Santel; 8—Gary Valiant; 9—Andy Douglas; 10—Raven.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Tracy Gilbert; 1—Bobby Wohlfert; 2—Stephen B. Esquire; 3—Styxx; 4—Hangtime; 5—Dillinger; 6—Jack Hammer; 7—D.Z. Hyde; 8—Joey Silvia; 9—Shaq Knox; 10—Cade Sydal.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:

NIGEL MCGUINNESS

(C) 220, London, England

1—TYLER BLACK

(3) 210, Davenport, IA

2—JERRY LYNN

(4) 185, Minneapolis, MN

3—AUSTIN ARIES

(2) 202, Milwaukee, WI

4—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(5) 236, Tulsa, OK

5—JIMMY JACOBS

(8) 173, Grand Rapids, MI

6—BRYAN DANIELSON

(1) 185, Aberdeen, WA

7—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI

(6) 240, Schaffhausen, Switz.

8—JAY BRISCOE

(-) 205, Laurel, DE

9—NECRO BUTCHER

(-) 230, Morgantown, WV

10—RHETT TITUS

(-) 195, Long Beach Island, NJ

NWA

Champion:

BLUE DEMON JR.

(C) 228, Mexico City, Mexico

1—ADAM PEARCE

(2) 248, San Diego, CA

2—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(1) 236, Tulsa, OK

3—OLIVER JOHN

(-) 228 Sacramento, CA

4—PHIL SHATTER

(10) 247, Paris Island, SC

5—MIKE DIBIASE

(6) 220, Amarillo, TX

6—KING V

(4) 485, Harlem, NY

7—SCOTTY MAC

(-) 205, Kelowna, B.C.

8—RYAN TAYLOR

(-) 212, Long Beach, CA

9—TREVOR MURDOCH

(5) 241, Waxahachie, TX

10—KEIJI MUTO

(3) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

JAPAN

1—KENSUKE SASAKI

(3) 254, Fukuoka, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

2—HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(-) 231, Gifu, Japan

3—KEIJI MUTO

(1) 243, Yamanashi, Japan

AJPW Triple Crown champion

4—JUN AKIYAMA

(-) 243, Osaka, Japan

5—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(4) 245, Kyoto, Japan

6—SATOSHI KOJIMA

(7) 247, Tokyo, Japan

7—HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(5) 254, Kyoto, Japan

8—GO SHIOZAKI

(-) 220, Kumamoto, Japan

9—GIANT BERNARD

(-) 331, Boston, Massachusetts

10—KOTARO SUZUKI

(-) 183, Saitama, Japan

MEXICO

1—MISTICO

(1) 167, Mexico City, Mexico

2—MESIAS

(10) 245, Bayamon, Puerto Rico

3—AVERNO

(2) 174, Mexico City, Mexico

4—MEPHISTO

(-) 198, Mexico City, Mexico

5—LA PARKA

(6) 216, Hermosillo, Mexico

6—VOLADOR JR.

(-) 170, Monclova, Mexico

7—LA SOMBRA

(-) 175, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

8—ZORRO

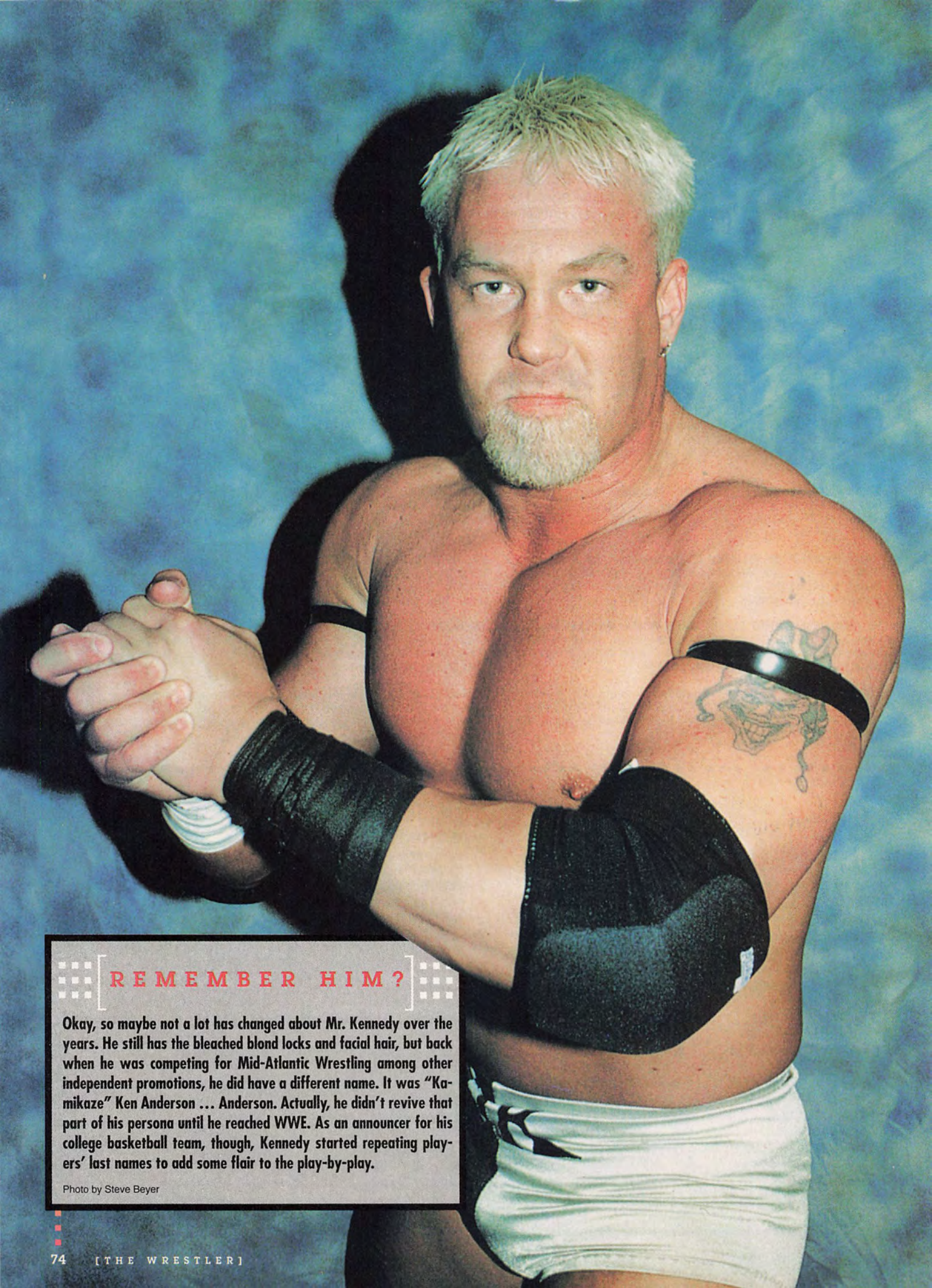
(4) 201, Guadalajara, Mexico

9—CHESSMAN

(8) 231, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico

10—BLUE PANTHER

(7) 194, Gomez Palacio, Mexico



REMEMBER HIM?

Okay, so maybe not a lot has changed about Mr. Kennedy over the years. He still has the bleached blond locks and facial hair, but back when he was competing for Mid-Atlantic Wrestling among other independent promotions, he did have a different name. It was "Kamikaze" Ken Anderson ... Anderson. Actually, he didn't revive that part of his persona until he reached WWE. As an announcer for his college basketball team, though, Kennedy started repeating players' last names to add some flair to the play-by-play.

Photo by Steve Beyer

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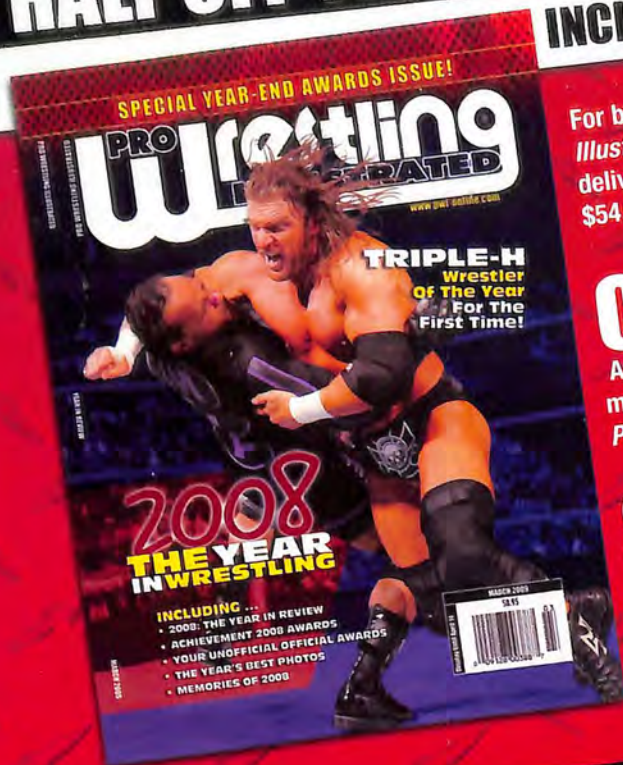
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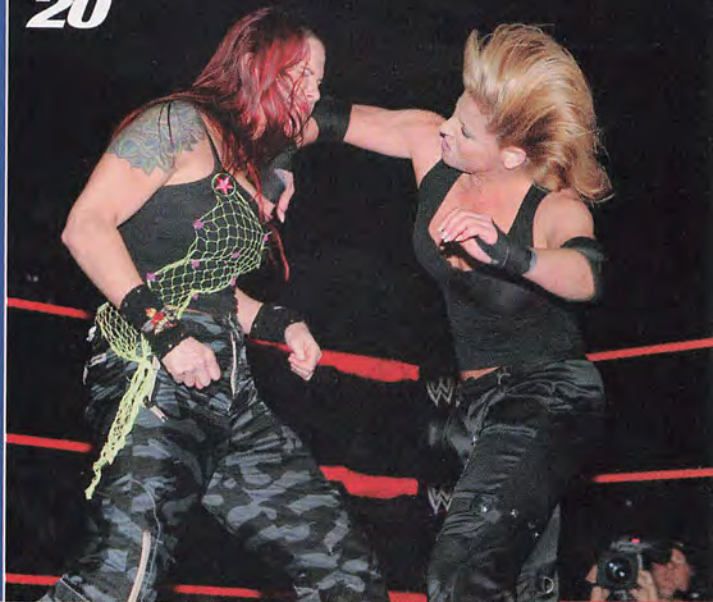
inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

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COVER DESIGN:
Joseph Rogan

Look for the Volume 28, 2009, issue of
The Wrestler/INSIDE WRESTLING on sale May 26, 2009

Send letters to:
Sincerely Yours
P.O. Box 1148
Fort Washington, PA 19034
or e-mail letters to
insideletters@yahoo.com

PLAYING WITH HIS EMOTIONS

When Randy Orton punted Vince McMahon in the head, I chuckled. When he won the Royal Rumble, I frowned. When he threatened a lawsuit and to put WrestleMania on hold, I was angry.

Okay, Randy, so you won the guaranteed 'Mania main event: Congratulations. But you can't just walk around holding that over people's heads. You say that WWE would break its contract with you by firing you? What about the contract

you broke when you kicked your boss in the head?

So go ahead, take this to court. I'm pretty sure you'll lose, which, in the end, would be the best thing for WWE. Then it would be able to get a real main-event quality wrestler in WrestleMania.

ARNOLD LANCASTER
South Wayne, WI

ALL ABOUT THE GAME

TNA, in reality, isn't so far off from *TNA Impact* the videogame. For those of you who haven't played the game, the basic storyline is that a new rookie sensation wins the World title. Then, after the show, he gets beat up by jealous wrestlers.

In reality, wrestlers like A.J. Styles, Samoa Joe, and The Motor City Machine Guns have all had to take a step back to make way for the Main Event Mafia. One place where the game really separates play from reality is with the Frontline.

In the video game, there is no help for the rookie. That is why I'm glad to see all of the young, better wrestlers taking a stand for what is right. Let's just hope we see a resolution to this on the real *Impact*, and we don't have to settle for a virtual simulation first.

COLE HOLDREN
cmcholdren@netzero.net

THANK YOU, MATT HARDY

For years I've sat and watched as Jeff Hardy came out of nowhere to become some gigantic fan favorite, but why? Sure, he jumps off of anything, onto anything, all the time, but who doesn't do that anymore? It was with his latest push to fan

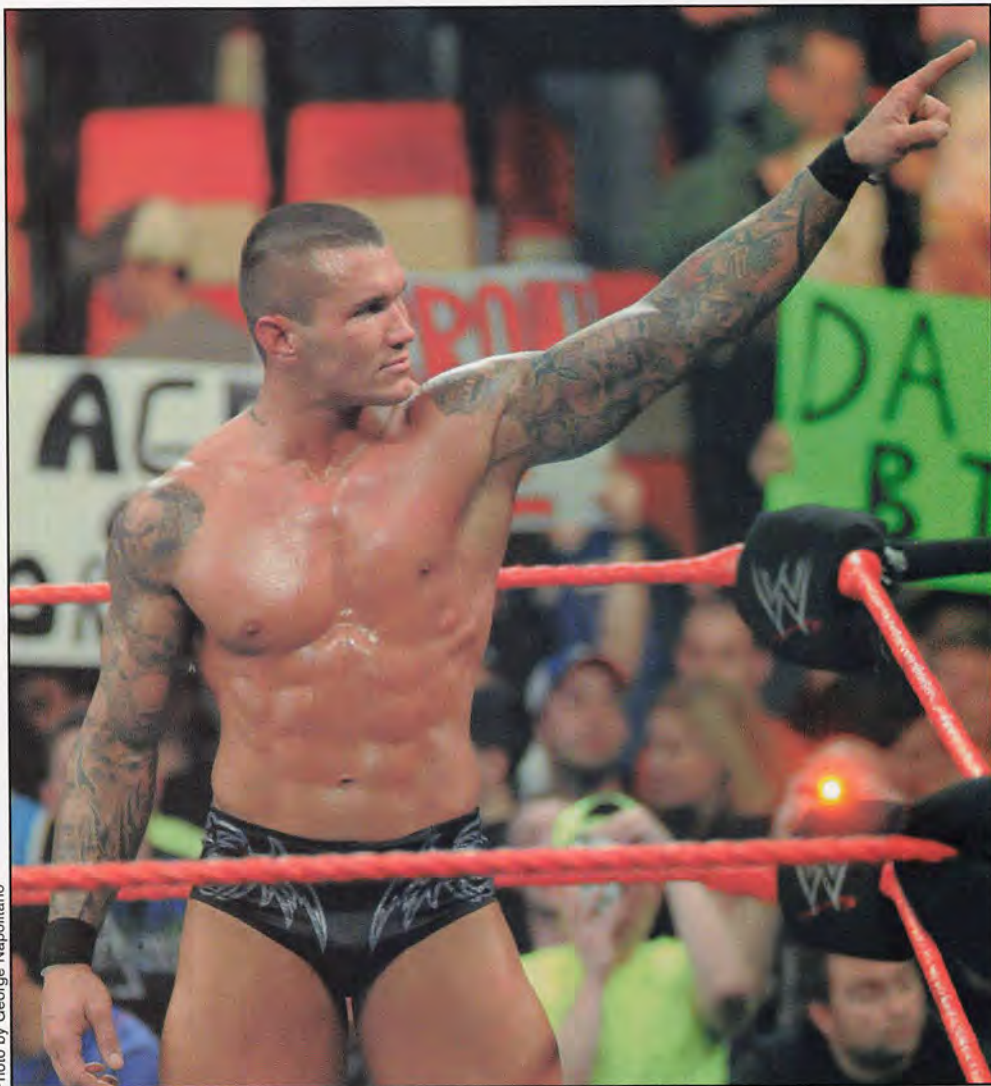


Photo by George Napolitano

Orton may be pointing his way to WrestleMania, but how guaranteed is that shot of his? Arnold Lancaster of South Wayne, Wisconsin, feels Orton's lawsuit will fail and that not having Orton for 'Mania could be a positive thing.

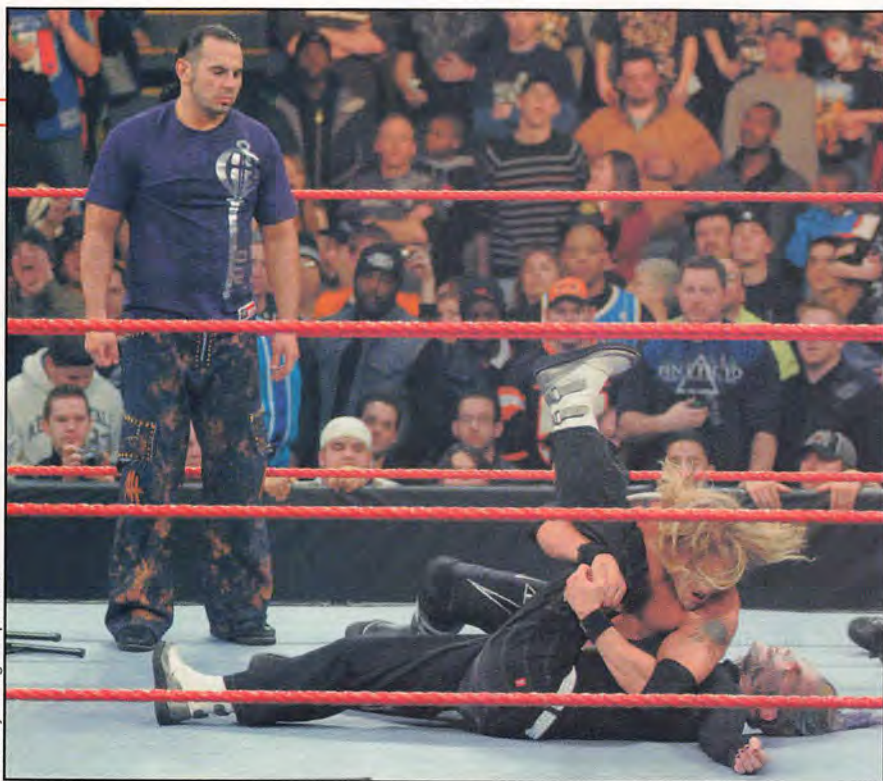


Photo by George Napolitano

When Matt Hardy slammed a steel chair into Jeff's head at the Royal Rumble, many fans were left in shock. But reader John Stevens thought it was the highlight of the Rumble. The glare Matt gave really hammered home just how serious the situation was.

favorite that I really lost all hope for Smackdown.

Don't forget, Jeff Hardy fans, this is the same "star" who has been suspended twice for Wellness Policy violations. How can you like/trust a wrestler who can't even trust himself? That is why I fully support the actions of Matt Hardy. I've waited so long for someone to smash that darn Jeff in the head with a chair and take away everything he has. I just never thought it would be his brother Matt.

Sitting at home, watching the Rumble with some friends, I couldn't help but smile as Matt just stood there, expressionless, as he watched Edge pin his poor, little brother.

Good job, Matt. And thank you.

JOHN STEVENS
Fort Lauderdale, FL

SO STRATUS-FIED

I read a letter in *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* Vol. 26, 2009, from Tim Sullivan about how he was unsatisfied with the coverage of Trish Stratus. I couldn't disagree more with him.

Two years ago, when Trish retired, it created a huge gap in the Divas

division of WWE. Trish was a rare talent to women's wrestling. She was the only woman of her time comparable to the Fabulous Moolah. Stratus was one of the true female competitors that worked her way to the top, without winning a Diva Search.

I will give credit to females like Beth Phoenix and Natalya, both are excellent competitors and can wrestle. But Natalya has hardly shown me anything impressive since coming to WWE. Phoenix is the best woman going in WWE today, but she has only won two Women's titles and does not have the tough competition that Trish had in Victoria, Lita, and Jazz.

I hope the writers of this magazine and its sister publications will continue to cover Trish Stratus. I feel Trish deserves every bit of the coverage for her hard work and dedication to women's wrestling. She was, is, and always will be the classiest female wrestler of her time.

JUSTIN WICK
Clintonville, PA

(Editor's note: To see where Trish is now, check out *Whatever Happened To ... ?* on page 20.) □

INSIDE Wrestling

STANLEY WESTON
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PUBLISHER

Stuart M. Saks

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Frank Krewda

MANAGING EDITOR

Jeff Ruoss

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

David Romanosky

ART DIRECTOR

Joseph Rogan

CONTRIBUTING DESIGNER

Olivia Sheehan

PRE-PRESS PRODUCTION SERVICES

Cliff Campo

Dave Dickey

Bethany Lawler

SENIOR WRITERS

Dan Murphy

Brandi Mankiewicz

Harry Burkett

David Lenker

Frank Ingiosi

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Matt Brock

Bill Meltzer

Elizabeth A. Hunter

C.F. Hunter

Brady Hicks

Gerry Strauss

Michael Moore

Al Castle

Matt Brock

Brian Solomon

Tim Drake

Al Alven

Louie Dee

Dan Harrington

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

George Napolitano

Joe Zanolle

Mike Lano

Koichi Yoshizawa

Greg Greenland

Scott Romer

Buddy Lamantia

Duane Long

Timothy A. Walker

George Tahinos

Wayne McCarty

Dorothy Lee

Robert Payes

Robert Beukema

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST

Lash LeRoux

GENERAL MANAGER

Arnold C. Joseph

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

Kenneth J. Gudaitis

CIRCULATION SERVICES

David Tyler

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

(215) 461-0583

ssaks@sepublications.com

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

Sports & Entertainment Publications LLC

P.O. Box 529

Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0529

1-800-846-6438

custsrvcsep@sepublications.com

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By Harry Burkett

IN WHAT HAS become wrestling's version of the **Rodney King** incident, there are a multitude of opinions regarding whether **Chris Jericho** was justified in shoving a female fan during a verbal confrontation that had the potential to turn into a full-scale riot. The episode occurred on February 7 at the Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre in Victoria, British Columbia.

Jericho had just lost to WWE World champion **John Cena** in a three-way main event also involving **Randy Orton**. When he attempted to leave the arena parking lot in his car, a group of hecklers gathered around his

vehicle at a stop sign. Jericho emerged from the car and told the fans to get out of his way. The heckling intensified as more fans—reportedly several hundred—continued to gather.

An exchange with 20-year-old **Ashley Levey** became particularly heated, with Levey spitting in Jericho's face. Jericho shoved her to the pavement with authority, prompting a male fan—**Kalen Juhl**—to lunge after him. By this time, the crowd was surging toward the former WWE World champion, with Jericho screaming at arena security to protect him.

Security finally succeeded in helping Jericho escape in his car. Police arrived a few minutes later to question witnesses. Fans on the scene had documented most of the incident with video cameras and cell phones, much of which made it to websites such as tmz.com and youtube.com (garnering more than 600,000 views). Victoria police confirmed that two fans had been arrested and later released without being charged.

When the incident was discussed on various media outlets, there was no clear consensus on which side was to blame: Jericho or the fans. On a Fox News Channel segment, for example, former prosecutor **Fred Tecce** said that Jericho and WWE were culpable because they had worked the fans up to a frenzy inside the arena, and that Jericho couldn't possibly be justified in throwing the first punch or shove. Defense attorney **David Wohl** said Jericho's behavior was understandable if he was being threatened physically, and the female fan had definitely violated his personal space. News anchor and attorney **Megyn Kelly** suggested Jericho was well within his rights because the female fan had crossed the line.

Wrestling message boards lit up across the Internet as well. Interestingly, wrestling fans didn't necessarily take Jericho's side, and opinions inside the business seemed to be just as diverse as those in the mainstream media.

This incident took place after the "Point/Counterpoint" was written on this very topic (*flip this issue to **The Wrestler** side, page 18*).

Controversial in a different way were **Matt Hardy's** actions at the Royal Rumble, where he deliberately clocked his own brother, **Jeff Hardy**, with a steel chair, causing him to lose the WWE championship to **Edge**. Obviously, Matt was frustrated about dropping the ECW title to **Jack Swagger** and losing a subsequent

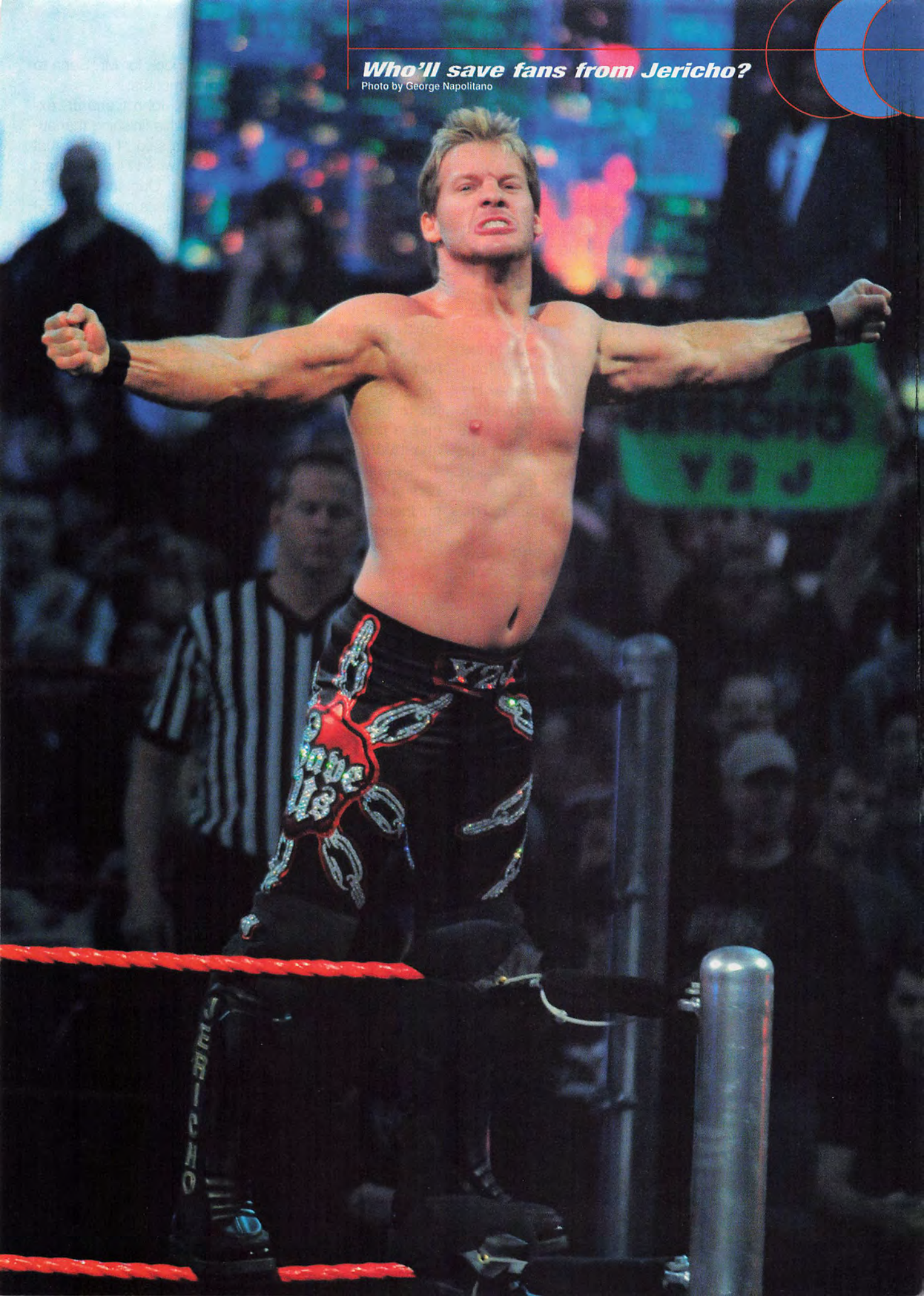


Photo by George Napolitano

Matt Hardy: Worse than Cain?

Who'll save fans from Jericho?

Photo by George Napolitano



rematch to the at the Rumble. I predict Matt vs. Jeff at WrestleMania XXV will be far more violent than the **Bret Hart-Owen Hart** brother-vs.-brother grudge match at WrestleMania X.

Shawn Michaels created his own share of chaos at the Rumble, superkicking his employer, **John Bradshaw Layfield**, and World champion John Cena during their big title bout. With Randy Orton winning the actual Rumble match to secure a title shot at WrestleMania XXV, there was plenty of intrigue headed into WWE's premier event.

Also of note at the pay-per-view, **Melina** scored a clean pinfall over **Beth Phoenix** to win the women's title at the six-minute mark.

You, my dear readers, may recall last issue's report concerning the **John Cena Sr.-Bob Orton Jr.** feud in the Boston-based Millennium Wrestling Federation. Now John Bradshaw Layfield has targeted the elder Cena. He approached Cena Sr. about investing in his energy drink company, and the two men subsequently engaged in a phone conversation that was made available on the MWF's website, bostonwrestling.com. The conversation was cordial at first, but became heated when JBL lashed out at Cena and announced he had purchased The Uprising, a heel faction consisting of "**Slyk**" **Wagner Brown**, **J-Busta**, **Tommaso Ciampa**, and **Luke Robinson** in the MWF. Now that The Uprising is a wholly

owned subsidiary of Layfield Energy, look for Mr. Cena to have plenty of troubles in the coming months.

In a recent interview with si.com, John Cena Jr. explained why he changed the name of his finishing maneuver to the "Attitude Adjustment." Cena said, "I realize that our audience has changed now, and, when I look out past the ring now, I see so many children. Originally, the FU was a pun in response to **Brock Lesnar**'s move (the F5) ... I know that kids are watching my every move and there are a lot of parents who know their kids look up to me."

Let's see ... Cena now calls the FU the "Attitude Adjustment," but wwe.com calls it "The Throwback," and **Michael Cole** rarely calls it anything at all. Maybe WWE could send a memo clearing this up.

He didn't talk to *Sports Illustrated*, but **Paul London** had a lot to say during an interview with *False Count Radio*, an Internet audio program. All indications are that his tenure in WWE was not easy. Perhaps it's best to give a point-by-point synopsis of what London hated about WWE.

His entrance music: London repeatedly asked members of Creative about changing his music, even trying to put them in touch with friends who were willing to compose new music for him.

Buh Buh Ray Dudley: According to London, **D-Von Dudley** was "cool" 100 percent of the time, but Buh Buh Ray was "cool" only "five percent of the time."

The exploding limo angle: Fans may remember that London gave a bedeviling smirk as **Vince McMahon** power-strutted to the limousine before meeting his apparent demise. McMahon thought London's expression ruined the moment, and London thinks McMahon held that against him.

Being banned from using the shooting star press: McMahon ordered that London stop using the finishing move he'd used for five years so newcomer **Evan Bourne** could establish it as his finisher. Funny, **Billy Kidman** had the same gripe five years ago when Brock Lesnar was given "exclusive rights" to the move.

Former partner Billy Kidman: He claimed that Kidman "threw him under the bus." Maybe he hated Kidman because he used the shooting star press, too.

Enough of Paul London. Let's talk about **Sting**, and how he retained the TNA World title in a characteristically convoluted main event at Against All Odds. This four-way bout for the championship seemed more like a tag team match, considering Brother Ray and Brother Devon are long-time partners, and Sting and **Kurt Angle** are the senior members of the Main Event Mafia. Heading into the match, the big question mark concerned Angle and whether he would sacrifice MEM unity to betray Sting to take his World title. By



Photo by George Napolitano

New PG-rated finisher for Cena

London had plenty
to say about WWE



Photo by George Napolitano

TNA logic, however, the opposite always holds true, meaning the real focus should have been on whether Ray and Devon could trust each other.

So, in a main event where anything could happen, nothing really did. Angle tangled with Sting, and even Brothers Ray and Devon had a few exchanges, but nothing that rose to the level of betrayal. In the end, Sting caught Ray with a scorpion deathdrop to score the pinfall and retain his title.

Self-proclaimed Legends champion **Booker T** made remarkably short work of wrestler-turned-referee-turned-wrestler **Shane Sewell**, capitalizing on a **Sharmell** leg trip with an axe-kick to score the pinfall at the five-minute mark. Booker proceeded to berate Sewell after the match, prompting **A.J. Styles**—who had been put out of action by the MEM the previous month—to make a surprise return and clothesline him to the arena floor.

In other matches at Against All Odds, TNA World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**Robert Roode** & **James Storm**) beat ex-champs **Consequences Creed** & **Jay Lethal** ... **Abyss** defeated former partner **Matt Morgan** in a grudge match ... Knockouts champion **Awesome Kong** beat **ODB** ... **Brutus Magnus** defeated **Chris Sabin** ... **Scott Steiner** beat former protégé **Petey Williams** ... X division champion **Alex Shelley** pinned **Eric Young**.

Former X division champ **Jerry Lynn** is now a former Showtime All-Star Wrestling International champion, too, as he lost SAW's top singles title to rival **Kid Kash** in Millersville, Tennessee. That may be good for SAW, con-

NEWS ANALYSIS

JERICO vs. THE MOB. Considering I'm an equal-opportunity guy, I have more of an issue with Jericho shoving a wrestling fan than with him shoving a woman (assuming she was coming off as a real threat). It does seem unprofessional for Jericho to engage these people, considering they were no doubt heckling Jericho the sports entertainer, not Jericho the person.

BROTHERLY HATRED. So Matt Hardy, jealous of his brother's success, costs Jeff Hardy the WWE championship. Wouldn't it have made more sense for Matt to turn on Jeff *after* he beat Edge, so they could feud over the title? If played incorrectly, this rivalry could fizzle out in the mid-card shuffle. I hope Matt's unforgivable wrestling sin will end up helping the Hardys' careers—but I don't think it will.

CENA'S ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT. John Cena claims it was his idea to change the name of his finisher to the "Attitude Adjustment," now more frequently known as "The Throwback." Like Bret Hart, Hulk Hogan, and many other WWE World champions before him, Cena cares about how children view him. Vince McMahon claims these stars shouldn't be viewed as role models. I'm glad Cena believes otherwise.

LONDON'S GRIPES. Paul London is one of the most engaging conversationalists I've ever met. He knows a lot about everything, and puts a great deal of thought into everything he does. But I think he let his guard down during his recent interview with *False Count Radio*. By focusing on the negative, and not talking much about the positive, he came across as a bitter know-it-all. I don't think that was his intention.

FOUR-WAY FUTILITY. I am very high on the TNA product these days. The personalities and storylines have gelled to the point that TNA is no longer considered a mere "alternative." *Impact* is destination programming in its own right. But Creative continues to try *too hard*. Sting's confusing four-way World title defense at Against All Odds is the perfect example. You could tell by the blank looks on the fans' faces.

sidering Lynn was out of the area for most of his tenure as champion. On a related note, veterans **Sean Casey** and **Chris Michaels** beat **Tribal Nation** for the promotion's tag team belts.

News from Pro Wrestling Entertainment: Heavyweight champion **Shane Valentine** scored a big win over **Hyjinx** in York, Pennsylvania, putting an end to his top contender's quest for the title ... Rising female star **Fate** upset **Sara Del Rey** to win the vacant ladies champi-



Booker swiftly silenced Sewell

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

onship ... The 57th incarnation of **Doink the Clown** is pulling pranks and taking names in this promotion.

This 'n' that: MyNetworkTV will downgrade itself from a full-fledged broadcast network to simply a "program supplier" for affiliate stations. This will not affect Smackdown in any way, though it is not a good sign for the health of the Fox-owned network ... **Tyler Black** is pursuing **Nigel McGuinness** hard and fast, pinning the Ring of Honor champion in a non-title bout, battling him to a time-limit draw, and earning another title shot in a four-way match to determine the new top contender—all within the span of 15 days ... **Phil Shatter** defeated **Chris LeRusso** and defending champ **Crusher Hansen** to win the NWA National belt in McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

From the Way to Treat a Worm Dept.: **The Cuban Assassin** and his main squeeze, **Fantasy**, were out for good times and stopped at a popular bar in Sunset Beach, Florida, where they spotted former NWO member and basketball bad boy **Dennis Rodman**. Cuban Assassin approached Rodman and tried to make small talk, but even dropping the name of mutual friend **Hulk Hogan** didn't elicit more than a casual gaze from "The Worm."

Understanding what it's like to be a celebrity hounded by the public, Cuban Assassin tried again. This time, a member of Rodman's entourage placed his hand on Assassin's chest. Assassin admits to responding with a

few choice words, leading to a few tense moments. He defused the situation by dropping the name of **Curt Hennig**, whom Rodman wrestled at an I-Generation Wrestling pay-per-view in Australia back in 2000. Rodman responded with a half-hearted hug.

"He is a pompous ass," said Cuban Assassin in a statement he posted on 1wrestling.com. "Maybe he couldn't handle his booze, maybe it was his public persona at its worst, maybe he had a bad day, or maybe that's just who he is ... I think someone needs to put Dennis Rodman in his place and teach him a lesson. I would love to be the one."

Way to go, Assassin! Really, is that any way for a Celebrity Championship Wrestling winner to behave?

Before we part, I'd like to send my condolences to the friends and family of **Jim Wilson**, who died of cancer on February 2 at age 67. Known for his impressive power, Wilson played in the NFL for seven years before becoming a full-time wrestling star in Georgia during the 1970s. Wilson became the scourge of the wrestling world—at least among promoters—when he criticized the NWA's then-monopoly over much of the business and pushed for unionization. He was even featured in the notorious *20/20* expose of pro wrestling back in 1984.

Wilson's in-depth critique of the industry, *Chokehold: Pro Wrestling's Real Mayhem Outside The Ring*, was released in 2003.

Although Wilson was blackballed from the business for his efforts, many of his criticisms were proven valid by the **Chris Benoit** tragedy and other scandals.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □



Rodman: Ticked-off an assassin

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!

THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING

Okay, it was an experiment. We took a gamble. Nobody had ever thought of binding two magazines, back cover to back cover, and selling them as one package. It wouldn't have worked with most magazines, but *The Wrestler* and *Inside Wrestling* have been so closely associated for the last 40 years, we thought it just might work. Well, it did! Reader response has been overwhelmingly positive. So if you missed the combination issues we've published so far, here's a chance to order them.

Vol. 2, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "The Angle Zone: Enter At Your Own Risk!" 60-Minute Interview: Bob Orton Jr. **Also Inside:** Booker T, Michaels-Christian, A.J. Styles, Ray "Big Bossman" Traylor. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Edge Of Insanity! Has He Ruined His Future?" **Also Inside:** Scott D'Amore, Paul London, Orlando Jordan, Joey Matthews, Kim Neilson, Kenny Bolin, Dunn & Marcos, Simon Dean, Mana, Kane-Snitsky, Magnus & Daivari, Pat Kenney.

Vol. 3, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Hogan Steals WrestleMania!" 60-Minute Interview: Terry Funk. **Also Inside:** Cornette vs. Heenan, Peley Williams, 10 unforgettable WrestleMania moments. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "WrestleMania 21: The Real Winners & Losers." **Also Inside:** Alexis Laree, Lance Hoyt, Shane Twins, Jack Evans, Val Venis, Arch Kincaid, Mike Mondo, Alere Littlefeather, Jeff Hammond, O.C. Boyz, Shawn Michaels.

Vol. 5, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Our Demand To The IOC: Strip Angle Of His Medal!" 60-Minute Interview: George Steele. **Also Inside:** Randy Orton, Bobby Lashley, Ken Kennedy. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Christian's TNA Gamble: If He Wins, Everybody Wins." **Also Inside:** Aaron Stevens, Homicide, Boogeyman, Raven-Riley, Talia & April, Rory & Robbie McAlister, Colt Cabana, Mickie James.

Vol. 7, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Rey Mysterio Jr.: Too Much Man For His Own Good?" 60-Minute Interview: J.J. Dillon. **Also Inside:** Kane, Styles-Daniels-Joe, Teddy Hart. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Sting Or Steve: The Makeup On A Man Or ... The Make Up Of A Man." **Also Inside:** Brent Albright, Nattie Neidhart, Paul Birchall, Jay Lethal, Bobby Roode, Jimmy Rave, Ruckus, Kid Kash.

Vol. 9, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Big Brother" Batista: "Anybody Who Abused Rey Will Pay!" 60-Minute Interview: Harley Race. **Also Inside:** DeGeneration X, Trish-Mickie, Chris Sabu. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** Extreme Success: "One Night That Changed The Face Of Wrestling." **Also Inside:** Chris Masters, Eric Young, Alex Shelley, A1, David Young, Sonjay Dutt, The Naturals, Matt Bentley, Elix Skipper, Homicide, Johnny Devine.

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MATT HARDY

HEIGHT: 6'1"

WEIGHT: 236

HOMETOWN: Cameron, NC

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

September 7, 2008—In a career filled with great tag team moments, Hardy finally reached the top as a singles competitor when he captured the ECW championship at Unforgiven. After weeks of pursuing then-champion Mark Henry, Hardy captured the title by winning WWE's first-ever championship scramble match.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Hardy has developed a strength aspect to his repertoire that had not been a part of his earlier tag team success. Because of that, he has been able to compete with the best of the industry and chase the top titles in WWE. He is one of the most balanced wrestlers on Smackdown. **WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:** Part of Hardy's appeal is that he allows his emotions to guide his approach in the ring and has such an intimate relationship with the fans. As such, it is nearly impossible to hide his vulnerabilities from opponents. Matt should probably emulate his brother, Jeff, in maintaining some aura of mystery and unpredictability.

PET FINISHER: Twist of Fate

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Recovering from a relationship breakup is difficult enough, but when it involves two of your co-workers and becomes fodder for television programming, it is exponentially more difficult. Hardy recovered from the Edge and Lita fiasco and accompanying release from WWE in 2005 to return more focused than ever on building his wrestling resume.

OUTLOOK FOR 2009: Although Hardy's 2009 did not start off as expected in that he dropped the ECW title early in the year to Jack Swagger, Matt is still considered one of the top talents in WWE. After hitting Jeff with a chair at the Royal Rumble, one has to imagine that Matt is about to explode onto Smackdown and show his younger brother that there is more than one Hardy in WWE.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I've always known how emotional Matt can be, but I never expected him to turn on me. We've been through so much together."

—Jeff Hardy



Photo by World Wrestling Entertainment/Scott Brinegar Courtesy of CW Network

ROXXI

HEIGHT: 5'9"

WEIGHT: 140

HOMETOWN: New Orleans, LA

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

April 13, 2008—In a division dominated by Awesome Kong, Roxxi carved out a place of her own by winning the first-ever "Queen Of The Cage" match at Lockdown. Roxxi pinned Angelina Love following her voodoo drop finisher to win a shot at the Knockouts title.

SHE DOES IT SO WELL: What Roxxi lacks in strength, she makes up for in agility and a wingspan unmatched by any other TNA Knockout. Her years on the independent circuit honing her craft have allowed Roxxi to incorporate different wrestling styles into her repertoire and use her lanky frame to her advantage. She spans much of the six-sided ring in only a few strides.

WHERE SHE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

She will need to challenge herself a bit more if she intends to capture the Knockouts title. Roxxi is very good competing against women she should defeat, but she struggles when the level of talent rises. It will remain Awesome Kong's division for the time being, but Roxxi is not far behind.

PET FINISHER: Voodoo drop

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE:

Maintaining her status as the heir apparent to the Knockouts championship has proven to be a daunting task for Roxxi. Taking every opportunity to square off with the likes of Awesome Kong, Roxxi has gained valuable experience—and some painful lessons—in the process.

OUTLOOK FOR 2009: Assuming her style and fearlessness allow her to stay healthy, 2009 may finally be the year Roxxi breaks through and becomes Knockouts champion. The brutal lessons of 2008 provided the type of base off which Roxxi can now launch the next phase of her career.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I love teaming with Roxxi because I know I can just feed off of her intensity and excitement. She's a great competitor who loves a good, old-fashioned fight." —Taylor Wilde



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

With Dave Lenker

WE'VE ALL KNOWN one of them. If you really think hard about it, you can probably remember more than one. You might even have more than one in your life right now.

Maybe the kid who sat right behind you in your eighth-grade English class or the guy who still works in the next cubicle over in your office.

Perfectly nice guy. You don't know him that well, but if pressed, you'd admit that he seems like a decent enough person. What's more, he's always been reasonably pleasant and he's never done anything bad to you.

And yet you just don't like him. He rubs you the wrong way for reasons you can't explain. Try to describe why you feel the way you do to someone and you'll get a far-off look and slow head nod in return. This guy gets on

your nerves and you just can't put into the right words why that is. Maybe the fact that you can't figure out why you don't like him makes you not like him even more. All logic has managed to slip through cracks in the molding around the window on this one.

I've met more than my share of people like this in my life, but for what seems like the longest time, I've grappled with the fact that there is one wrestler who fits into this category for me. It's not a man I have anything personal against. I don't know him well at all. But the truth is ...

I really can't stand Randy Orton—the wrestler, that is.

Understand that I don't mean "can't stand" in the sense of can't stand the kind of guy who would use Vince McMahon's cranium to practice his placekicking skills. We're not supposed to like a guy who does that kind of thing. We're supposed to be willing to pay to see someone kick the butt of someone like that. It's "can't stand" in the worst possible wrestling sense.

I want to be intrigued by his appearances, awed by his best matches, and hanging on his every syllable during each promo he delivers, but I just can't will myself to do it. It even makes me angry at times, because there's no good reason why I shouldn't find him entertaining. WWE has invested so much in him over just the past six months and built him up effectively as the most heinous and dangerous heel on its roster and yet ... nothing. Not from this observer anyway.

It isn't working for me. Orton has endured a lot of

setbacks since becoming a fixture in WWE early in this decade—many of them self-created—and by all accounts, he has worked hard to overcome a series of injuries and his own shortcomings and weaknesses.

Still ... not happening for me.

He has even gotten past his obsession with inserting an extended chinlock into seemingly every one of his matches and quietly become a better all-around wrestler, but ... you know where I'm going. His matches don't strike a chord with me, his look doesn't suck me in, and his promos leave me flat.

What's wrong with me here?

I've watched Orton live and on TV more times than I would care to count and for the longest time have tried to figure out what it is about him that just isn't connecting. Come on, this guy was number one in the "PWI 500" last year! He probably sells a lot of pay-per-views for WWE. What am I missing? It's not like the majority of you aren't reacting to him in a passionate way.

Is it just a personal thing? Hell, I know ardent long-time wrestling fans that have told me they just don't get why everyone thought Ric Flair was so wonderful.

Maybe it's just that WWE has worked too hard to put him in the position in which he stands today, poised to headline another *WrestleMania*. Maybe it's because he seems overproduced to me, for lack of a better word. It's like someone—er, Vince McMahon—decided close to a decade ago that Randy Orton was going to be one of WWE's biggest stars of the future. Unquestionably. Nothing was going to stop that from happening.

Lo and behold, nothing has stopped it from happening.



Photo by Duane Long

Randy Orton has the skills, look, and desire to be a major star in WWE, yet Senior Writer Dave Lenker feels all those attributes add up to nothing special. How will that bode for the Legacy leader's legacy?



Despite the inauspicious start to Triple-H's career, Lenker believes "The Game" will be remembered by future generations of wrestling fans.

You see, I've always pushed the theory that most of wrestling's biggest stars just kind of happen. Sure, they need the right opportunity and something of a push, but I'll argue that although Vinnie Mac saw something big in Hulk Hogan, "Hulkamania" took on a life and legend of its own momentum. McMahon never dreamed that big. He didn't see a big star in Steve Austin when he signed him. That's a stone-cold fact. Mick Foley never should have been a huge star, but he sure became one and still is one. I don't know that too many people expected John Cena to be as big as he has become back when he was The Prototype. Eric Bischoff didn't meet Bill Goldberg for the first time and immediately think, *I can see this guy having a winning streak of close to 200 and beating Hulk Hogan for the WCW World title in front of 40,000 screaming fans.*

One guy who was supposed to be a megastar from the start was The Rock, but he didn't become one until he was first rejected and then came back to embrace stardom on his own terms.

To an extent, maybe this is why Triple-H kind of slides in as a star not quite of the magnitude of The

Rock and Austin and maybe a few others. He was forced upon us to an extent.

But as for "The Game," well, I've never been as big a detractor as a lot of you have been or at least when he was at his ego-maniacal worst a few years ago. Then you have Orton and ... it still bugs me.

If I look at it in terms of music, it starts to make a little bit more sense.

There aren't many young artists out there—at least not in the mainstream—that hold my attention these days, and I have no interest whatsoever in shows like *American Idol*. If I accidentally come across a *Billboard* chart or something like it, I'll be lucky to recognize the names of three or four of the musicians currently boasting top 10 hits.

Maybe I'm just getting old and cranky, but I don't think we're in a golden age of popular music. Too many bands and singers seem overproduced and overmarketed.

Forget their looks for a moment, but is anyone going to remember any song by Britney Spears or Mariah Carey a generation from now? Go back 30 or 40 years and the great artists made it to the top on the basis of talent. Their greatest songs—most of which they actually penned themselves—will live forever.

Orton's place in wrestling history? It's far too soon to tell, but if he left the sport today, I'm not sure I'd remember him very well. He just looks to me like the prototypical WWE star of 2009, and maybe that isn't such a great thing after all.

Or maybe it's just me. I'm going to keep trying. □

DON'T MISS

PWI UPDATE WITH FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
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Pro Wrestling Illustrated Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi on women wrestling: "Sorry, WWE fans. But, as I've been chastised for in the past, I'll take a sound wrestling match between two women who know how to have one over two models/actresses rolling around in lingerie. Now, of course that only pertains to my chosen profession and not everyday life, in which case, the roles are completely reversed. But, when it comes to being part of a wrestling program, give me talent over catfights any day of the week."

Ingiosi on Impact going live: "Perhaps it's the mystery of what could happen now that fans aren't drawn into reading spoilers online for the prior two weeks; maybe it's just the thrill of those in attendance being able to tell their friends and families that they'll be on TV tonight and not some time in April. Whatever it is, last night's *Impact* came off with a renewed energy and excitement that TNA has lacked for quite some time."

Ingiosi on Ted DiBiase Jr.'s Raw debut: "The excitement surrounding the debut of the younger DiBiase is palpable and his surprise debut is much sooner than originally anticipated. The highly touted third-generation grappler should add to an increasingly solid foundation for the company and, if he pans out as promised, may be a mainstay for quite some time. No rips here—just wishing the new guy well."

**Frank Ingiosi ...
on pwi-online.com!**

7813/10.07

By Brandi Mankiewicz

I ALMOST FORGOT to do my good deed for the year in 2008. I figured that since I had taken so long to do one, I'd make it a doozy. On December 26, I took two guests to the Raw house show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, to share the wonders of an arena filled with toothless freaks and out-of-control kids. Surprisingly, it was a fun night.

Honestly, I haven't been to a WWE show in years. I'd rather watch it on TV than sit in an arena with smelly wrestling fanatics. I'm not the most social of creatures and

the thought of spending hours of my life crammed into a tiny, plastic seat surrounded by marks just makes my skin crawl. This occasion was different, though. It was going to be an abuse-laden night—and I'd be the abuser. Verbal abuse is definitely a hobby for most people here in Anthracite Coal Country. This trip would be fun.

Being a nice niece who is 5'9", I told my Uncle Gene who is smaller at 5'6" that I had tickets and one had his name on it. "Find a prom date, Short Stuff," I quipped. "I'll be

the chaperone." He just gritted his teeth, molesting a toothpick. My "Pocket Uncle" knew he was in for it on this night. Yes, he is so nicknamed because I do threaten him with carrying him in my pocket, like Bill Apter used to carry his teacup poodle Madison.

Promptly at 6 p.m. there was a knock on my front door. In walked my Uncle Gene and Eddie, a family friend who I'm surprised isn't a blood relative given the abundance of inbreeding in my home area. Sizing up the abuse competitors, I knew Eddie would be my wing man on this night. Once my snooty cats were satisfied with the greeting they received from the cute couple, we were on our way.

My Jeep Commander deftly carried us to our chocolately destination. Along the way, Eddie and Gene started waxing nostalgic about the good ol' days when giants like Andre dominated WWWF television. An interesting point of reference is that our anus of a town is situated within driving distance of Hamburg, where the shows were taped. It was enjoyable to sit there and listen to them. These are two longtime wrestling fans that are quite possibly the only two cool wrestling fans left. It didn't bother me to listen to them. It was almost as entertaining as listening to any old, grizzled veteran talk about the past to eager youngsters in a locker room. I was waiting for the opportunity, but sadly didn't get the chance to call either of them a mark.

We reached the Giant Center just as it started to sleet, so our hike to "will call" wasn't pleasant—made even ickier by throngs of little John Cena fans rushing toward the doors. Once inside, I turned to my uncle and said this gem: "My dad



Photo by George Napolitano

WWE World champion John Cena pandered to the crowd at a recent house show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, but that didn't prevent Brandi Mankiewicz from enjoying the show.

gave me an allowance to buy you anything you want!" just because I knew it would kill that happy feeling he may have had. He just gritted his teeth in return as Eddie laughed.

Our seats were the usual great seats that I normally get, only this time we had a bunch of young kids surrounding us. Now I was being ribbed because I hate kids. As we settled into our seats, the matches started and I continued my AIM discussions with several friends as my uncle and Eddie relaxed in their highly uncomfortable seats. While we were in a primo spot to see the ring, the seats in this new-ish arena had me pining for the seats in the old Hershey hockey barn down the road. No splinters, but definitely uncomfortable.

As the evening progressed, I realized that we were sitting in a section that included one of those loud-mouthed mark kids who thinks they know it all—and loudly proclaims it to those around him in a "I-am-God, come-listen-to-me" sort of way. Unfortunately, the little icon in training was completely wrong with most of his "facts." Granted, he did preface almost every outburst with "Well, I read on the Internet that ..." Yep, another Japanese tape-trading, five-star-counting Nerfherder who will only see a naked D-cup the week he grows one on his own chest.

Oh, the humanity.

At least Gene and Eddie are oblivious to the kid. They were too busy commenting on Kelly Kelly's body. I was too busy commenting on AIM about Kelly Kelly screwing up her one-line promo. So much for overcoming stereotypes.

The night went by rather quickly. Most matches were fine for a house show. I didn't rate each of them with the star system, but I did find myself



Photo by George Napolitano

Chris Jericho's attack on John Cena left at least one young Hershey fan horrified, but Mankiewicz delighted in watching the life lesson on cheating unfold before her eyes.

enjoying them. I wasn't marking out like the kids around me, but I did actually stop all communications via my iPhone for long periods of time. Thankfully, Gene and Eddie didn't mark out, either. They were well-behaved despite being surrounded by screaming, sugar-filled kids. Okay, so Uncle Gene giggled a little more than I think is allowed for a grown man when Hornswoggle was at ringside, but I'm just thankful that there were no puddles on his seat for me to clean up.

The most poignant moment of the night occurred during the main event. As John Cena stood in the ring feeding his ego off of the screaming masses, that dastardly Chris Jericho attacked him before

the bell had even rung to signify the start of the match. Almost every mark in the crowd was standing and caterwauling ... except for one lone boy sitting near me. This child of about four years old turned to his dad and tearfully cried, "Daddy! Jericho cheated!" before launching into a full-on tear fest.

Now, to my left were Gene and Eddie, quietly enjoying the beat-down going on in the ring. To my right was this inconsolable child crying in his father's arms because a villain had cheated. In the center of it all was me, with my dark heart enjoying the tears and cries. This was definitely my receipt for a good deed played out: a chance to enjoy being a bitch once again. □

THIRD-GENERATION grappler with the pressure of history on his tattooed shoulders ... Future was in doubt after a dishonorable discharge from the Marines ... Entered the family business against the wishes of his parents ... Honed his skills in Ohio Valley Wrestling ... Brought up to main WWE roster in 2002 ... Originally the golden boy of the fans ... Looks and gracious attitude immediately won him support among the masses ... Didn't last long ... Obnoxiously updated the fans on the status of a questionable injury ... Self-absorbed egomaniac came through shortly thereafter ... Would carry him to the loftiest heights in WWE ... Made the unprecedented leap from mid-level rulebreaker to budding superstar ... Hitched on with Triple-H's Evolution stable ... Captured the Intercontinental championship in 2003 by defeating Rob Van Dam at Armageddon ... Helped Evolution capture all three major championships simultaneously ... Initially held the gold for seven months ... Success bred even more conceit ... Began referring to himself as the "Legend Killer" ... Named his finisher after his own initials ... Groomed by Triple-H to one day become a world champion ... Friction developed in the group ... Wanted to rise too quickly for Evolution's liking ... Could not be stopped despite the factions' concern ... Became number-one contender for the WWE World championship in 2004 ... Captured the gold at SummerSlam

by defeating Chris Benoit ... Youngest world champion in the history of WWE at age 24 ... Party didn't last long ... Evolution turned against him the following night ... Title reign lasted only a month ... Took the moniker "Legend Killer" to heart ... Targeted, arguably, the biggest legend in WWE, The Undertaker ... Engaged in a nasty feud in efforts to destroy the "Dead Man" ... Father became involved in the feud ... Defeated by 'Taker in Hell In A Cell at Armageddon ... Shifted focus back to becoming a two-time world

default was acceptable ... Lost the title and won it back in the same evening ... Survived a series of challenges from Shawn Michaels ... Developed an appreciation for punting opponents in the skull ... Defended the title on his terms and at his leisure ... Staved off efforts by upstart Jeff Hardy ... Fought longtime nemesis John Cena shortly thereafter ... Warded off Cena as much as possible ... Retained the title at WrestleMania 24 in a triple threat match ... Seemed to defy the odds despite the hopes of the fans



Photo by Duane Long
Ever since dropping his WWE title to Triple-H in mid-2008, Orton has been stalking the competition and waiting to make his next move toward the top of the pile. With a guaranteed title shot at WrestleMania, the "Legend Killer's" eyes are set firmly on "The Champ."

champion ... Feuded with Rey Mysterio Jr. over a guaranteed title shot ... Insulted the recently deceased Eddie Guerrero in order to goad Mysterio into a match ... Won the title shot from Mysterio, only to lose in the title match at WrestleMania 22 ... Engaged in brief and unmemorable feud with Hulk Hogan ... Lost direction for a bit before pairing up with Edge to form Rated RKO ... Captured the WWE World tag team title with Edge ... Held the gold briefly before both massive egos caused the team's dissolution ... Awarded the WWE championship at No Mercy ... Championship by

... Cemented place as arguably the most hated man in WWE ... Lost the title to Triple-H in the process of fending off Cena ... Could not recapture the gold despite numerous attempts ... Broke collar bone at One Night Stand 2008 ... Out of action for five months ... Returned with renewed focus and even more sinister intentions ... Before returning to the ring,

made a cameo that cost C.M. Punk the World title ... The head punt once again did the job ... Began assembling second-generation wrestlers as his followers ... Referred to group as The Legacy ... Turned against member Ted DiBiase Jr. to teach him a lesson ... Used group to further his lust for world championship gold ... Started off 2009 with two monumental moments ... Won the Royal Rumble match for the first time in his career ... Did so six days after punting his boss, Mr. McMahon, in the head on Raw ... Running low on legends at this point. □



RANDY ORTON

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Photo by Duane Long

By Mike Lano

TRISH STRATUS

WATCHING THE FUTURE WWE Hall of Fame Diva surprise her home town of Toronto, Ontario, on the December 22 episode of Raw—successfully teaming with John Cena to take down “Glamarella” (Santino Marella and Beth Phoenix)—got many wondering what seven-time former WWE women’s champ Patricia Ann Stratigias has been up to lately.

The 33-year-old Richmond Hill, Ontario, native, who was trained by Ron Hutchinson, is “as always, crazy-busy. I just wish I had more hours in each day!” Stratus said.

Before she became a wrestler, Trish was a student at Toronto’s York University majoring in biology and kinesiology. Soon after enrolling, the instructors went on strike and she began working at an area fitness club. It was there that she was spotted by an agent, who gave her a job as a fitness model. While working as a model, Stratus caught the attention of a traveling WWF road agent, who recommended that she be signed.

Although she has been gone from regular WWE programming for more than two years, “Canada’s Greatest Export” has never really left the public’s eye. There have been several returns to the ring, appearances on *MADtv*, a regular on the CBS celeb-cop reality show *Armed And Famous*, and her many charity events.

To stay in shape, the fitness-crazy Stratus continues

to participate in triathlons and other sporting events for charity. In fact, she’s now truly respected as a tireless celebrity volunteer for foundations like Dignitas International Fund (a global AIDS foundation) and the Special Olympics. She also works with Batista to raise funds for the New York Ronald McDonald House, Easter

Seals, and Dreams Take Flight—a program that takes children from mentally, physically, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds to Disneyland for a day.

“The extracurricular things I did while in WWE like Make-A-Wish Foundation were charities I wanted to continue giving time back to when I left wrestling,” Stratus said. “I still feel very strongly about doing my best for them since I’ve been so blessed.”

And, of course, fans still ask to be “Stratus-fied” with an cappella reprise of “I Just Want You,” her recording debut made while in WWE.

Stratus’ success in WWE was one of the great stories in the company’s history. Hired based primarily on her beauty, Trish worked tirelessly with trainer Fit Finlay to become a formidable wrestler. Along with her seven WWE titles, Stratus is also a two-time *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* Woman of the Year, a three-time WWE Babe of the Year, and Diva of the Decade. She is also one of the most financially successful female athletes of her generation.

Trish officially announced her retirement from the ring to “conquer marriage and new challenges” while in her beloved Toronto during Unforgotten 2006. In her final match, Stratus took on reigning champion Lita in what turned out to be a classic. In the end, Trish snared Lita in the sharpshooter to record her seventh championship.

Weeks later, Trish married her high school sweetheart



Courtesy of USA Network



A younger Trish and Traci Brooks workout under the tutelage of trainer Ron Hutchinson. Trish, who was always a passionate student of the sport, is now channeling that same passion toward a variety of charity endeavors.

Ron (after 14 years as a couple) at a spectacular wedding ceremony WWE Divas still talk about fondly, with many serving as her "ring girls."

Trish has also been busy with the April 2008 opening of her fitness, health, and yoga studio in North Toronto, aptly named "Stratusphere." She began using yoga to treat an injured lumbar disc and later became a certified Ashtanga yoga instructor, teaching classes at the 5,200-square-foot studio her husband built for her.

No stranger to magazine covers like *MuscleMag International*, she's also been back on the covers of *Chill* and *Toro* magazines promoting her latest TV series sporting a more natural, darker coif. "I've tried doing what The Rock does, hitting all possible media to promote whatever I'm doing at the time."

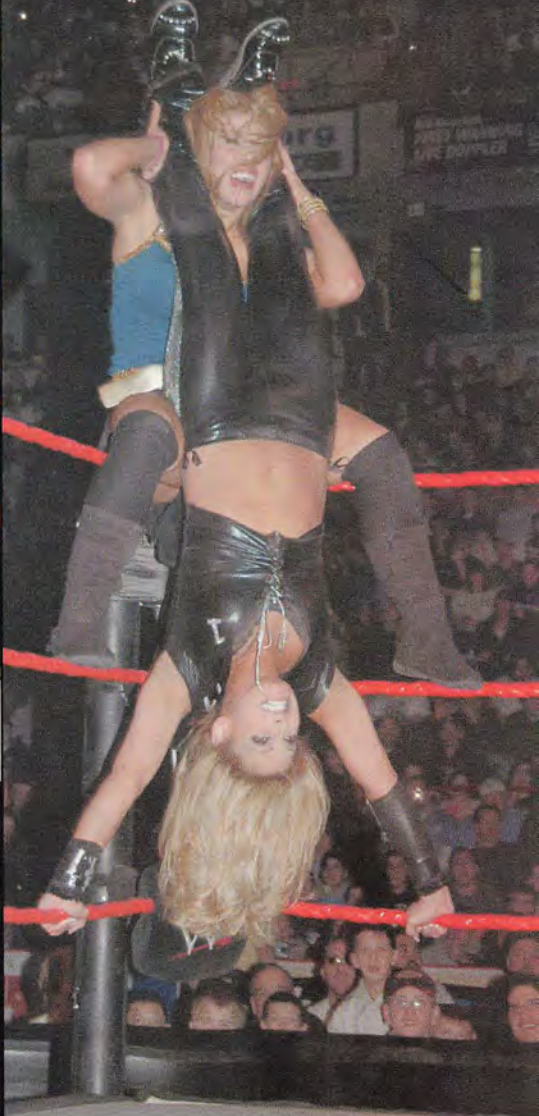
Her latest jet-set show, also called *Stratusphere*, debuted last September on Canada's Travel and Escape cable channel. She travels globally in search of the most exotic locations and daring physical challenges for



each episode, from *Glima* wrestling in Iceland to fire dancing in Fiji, where she built a *bilibili* traditional raft and sailed down the Sigatoka River to Muay Thai boxing in Thailand.

"I had to quickly learn this MMA skill to go five rounds in the ring with a highly experienced fighter," she said.

Other episodes of *Stratusphere* have seen Trish visit India to study *Kalarippayattu* (stick and sword fighting), competing in *Vo Binh Dinh* martial arts in Vietnam, bungee jumping in Bali, and helping pilot an America's Cup sailboat in Auckland, New Zealand.



While Trish waged thrilling battles against Mickie James (above) and Lita (left) in WWE, the seven-time former WWE women's champion now seeks thrills around the globe as part of her travel/adventure TV show *Stratusphere*.

Despite the exotic antics, Trish remains just a click away from her growing legion of fans. On her website (trishstratus.com) you'll find all new autographed photos and trading cards plus her total "Nu-Trish-lon" diet and training program as originally spotlighted globally in *Oxygen* magazine.

"The overall thing I'm doing now is trying to help others whenever I can," Stratus said. "Maybe entertaining them or hopefully helping people anywhere become healthier and hopefully living longer, more productive, satisfying lives. And in doing so, I'm having a great time. Life couldn't be better." □

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

TOKYO, JAPAN: Funny how a lot of TNA's best get treated better in the Far East than they do half the time inside the Impact Zone in Orlando. I've never appreciated this little island nation as much as the average jet-setting American tourist, but I am not and never will be a tourist. Only made the long flight for the big January Tokyo Dome this year because my good friend Koichi Yoshizawa invited me personally, and because last I talked to Saks, he mentioned that he wasn't sure he could fit the trip into the travel budget for the current fiscal quarter or some mumbo jumbo corporate talk like that. We'll see when my next expense check comes back, but Saks is known to back down on matters like this. ¶As far as Tokyo Dome shows go, I've seen better, but TNA went a solid three for three. Chris

Sabin and Alex Shelley collected the IWGP junior tag belts by besting Yujiro and Tetsuya Naito, Kurt Angle and Kevin Nash teamed with Riki Choshu and Masa Chono in a winning eight-man effort, and Team 3-D collected more tag gold by beating Togi Makabe and Toru Yano for the big IWGP belts. ¶Getting harder not to include Brothers Ray and Devon among the all-time tag team elite. Not their fault the golden days of tag team wrestling have long since passed. Something tells me TNA would be better off just letting guys like Shelley, Sabin, Team 3-D, and even Angle just let their wrestling stand for itself and forget all the silliness about who's taking over the show. Might have to start making this an annual trip again if Koichi promises to brew up his special brand of sake for me again. Yeah, you read that right. Matt Brock suddenly likes Japanese wine. Maybe retirement is closer than I thought.

CHARLOTTE, NC: A week after winning IWGP junior tag gold together half a world away, Chris Sabin and Alex Shelley squared off for the vacant TNA X division title at Genesis. To be fair, TNA fans more than appreciated this battle, which Shelley won after faking a knee injury and rolling up Sabin. Great thing was, it didn't look like this was the first step in breaking up one hell of a young team. Sabin hugged Shelley afterward, actually appreciating the one-upsmanship. Just gnaws at me that a match like this could get lost in all that Main Event Mafia garbage and a sluggish Sting vs. Rhino match that followed a bit later. ¶Put this Shelly-Sabin match later on the card and maybe later in the year and you have yourself a legit Match of the Year candidate. With Mick Foley, Scott Steiner, Kip James, and Booker T all in the main event, I half-expected Ric Flair to show up



Photo by George Napolitano

JEALOUSY TEARS THE HARDY BOYS APART

given the location of the pay-per-view. They could have all pretended it was 1999 again. ¶ Didn't stick around for any of the *Impact* tapings that followed later back in Orlando, but saw where those Mafia guys took over the TV show, commentary and all, for a while. Good thing I wasn't there for that. They would have had to find someone to take over for this reporter as he headed for the exit. Hell, I'd rather do Disney than watch that.

DETROIT, MI: Let it be known that it was in this cold, dank, miserable city on January 25, 2009, that the Hardy Boyz officially ceased to exist. That's pretty much what Matt Hardy said later, but it was here at the Royal Rumble that Matt, still smarting from his inability to regain the ECW title from young Jack Swagger and tired of being his brother's keeper through all the tough times, betrayed Jeff and cost him the WWE title. ¶ Lost in all this was the minor detail that his betrayal netted Edge that gold. Wasn't but a few years back that Matt would have done just about anything to inflict major, and permanent, bodily harm on Edge for stealing away the very real love of his very real life, Lita, and carrying on an illicit affair with her. That tells you how much jealousy and hate are coursing through Matt's veins these days, and I don't really get it. ¶ Problem is, I just don't think fans' long-time on-and-off love affair with the Hardys will let this feud work. It's kind of like they're trying to hate Matt, but they're not sure they can. Seems to me this is going to be one of those feuds that just doesn't feel right on



MOTOR CITY MACHINE GUNS: COMING APART AT THE SEAMS

either end and will be awkward and uncomfortable to watch. ¶ Not so sure the folly of the ECW title, which I figure means only a little more in 2008 than it did when Johnny Hot Body was defending in front of 100 or so drunks in a bingo hall in Philly 17 years ago, is worth this kind of trouble. It's not even like Matt wasn't winning a lot more than he was losing until a month or so before the Rumble. ¶ Meanwhile, all the stars in the sky were aligning for Jeff. If he could have gotten past Edge and maybe Triple-H at WrestleMania, he'd have had some real momentum, really put his signature on that title belt. Now it feels like maybe he was a one-hit wonder with the WWE title, only a little better than Kane's 24-hour run as WWF World champ more than a decade ago. ¶ A one pay-per-view reign might as well be 24 hours these days. History is going to tell us this was a bad night for both Jeff and Matt. A tearful reunion might happen somewhere down the road, but it'll never be the same.

CHICAGO RIDGE, IL: Great thing about Ring of Honor no matter who's calling the shots in the back is the way this promotion keeps turning over its roster. If you hadn't seen an ROH show in a year or so, you might not recognize half the wrestlers you saw tonight. Guys get stale, guys move on and up, guys just leave, and there's always someone with all the tools ready to step in and take a prime spot on the card. And yet you just never know, especially in these depressing financial times, when this little engine that has chugged along

since 2002 won't be able to chug along anymore. ¶ Two guys that are getting a lot of my ROH attention these days are Tyler Black and Claudio Castagnoli. Black earned himself a shot at the ROH belt here at the Caged Collision pay-per-view taping by beating Jimmy Jacobs, Austin Aries, and Bryan Danielson in a four-way. Would have cashed in his shot right here, too, after Nigel McGuinness dispatched El Generico. But Jacobs and Aries attacked and made him wait for another day. As much as I like Black's talent and guts, I'm not sure I'd make him the favorite against McGuinness. ¶ In case you haven't noticed, McGuinness' reign has stretched beyond the 15-month mark and it seems like it's been a lot longer, maybe because he seems to have so many enemies. Samoa Joe's record 21-month ROH title reign is almost within reach. WWE took a look at him years ago when he was nobody and took a pass. It's time for another look, and soon. □

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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Special Section!

THE ALL-TIME WRESTLEMANIA DREAM MATCHES

Section compiled by Al Castle

It is, perhaps, the singlemost important goal of a WWE matchmaker—to present, at the biggest event of the year, the biggest match possible.

It is known as a “dream match.” But with five hours of original programming each week, and a three-hour pay-per-view each month to consider, putting together a true dream match at the biggest show of the year has become harder and harder to do.

There are few, if any, matchups between current WWE stars that we haven’t seen at least once, if not several times. And so what passes for a dream match these days isn’t what it used to be.

But what if that whole “current” part wasn’t a factor? What if matchmakers could employ a time machine of sorts to pit wrestlers from any time in the WrestleMania era together in the ring?

What you’d get is the potential for the kind of bout that would capture the very definition of the term “dream match”—matches that would make history the moment the contestants stood face to face inside a ring.

In some cases, they could match up stars who are nearly mirror images of each other, but whose paths never crossed because of time or other circumstances. In other cases, the matches could settle age-old questions about who, in fact, was the best in a particular category. The star power alone of the participants in

some matches would be enough to make their showdowns “must-see” affairs.

And in some cases, it is the WrestleMania stage that would make a match extra-special. That’s because, of all the matches a wrestler competes in during his career, it is what he accomplishes at WrestleMania that will be remembered above all other things.

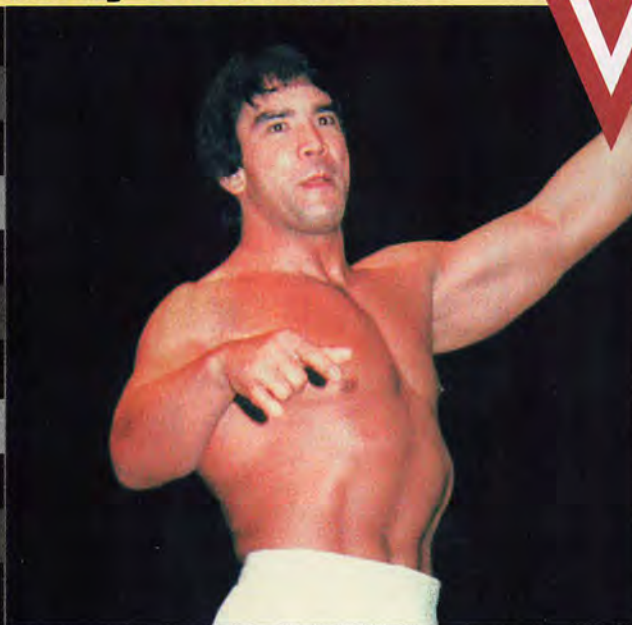
That can bode poorly for some wrestling stars, who despite massive career successes have found success at the “Showcase Of The Immortals” elusive. And so, for some, these matches represent not only “dream matches,” but what would likely be career highlights for the men—and women—involved.

With the WrestleMania theme in mind, we have set two ground rules for our list. For one, the contestants must have competed at a WrestleMania. And, secondly, wrestlers must be chosen from the peak year of their WrestleMania run. In some cases, wrestlers’ primes predated 1985’s inaugural WrestleMania.

INSIDE WRESTLING’s staff of writers and editors have also conferred to offer you what we think would happen if these dream matches took place, including who we think would come out on the winning end.

So sit back, relax, and enjoy this ride into the land of what never was, what could have been, and—who knows—what may still be to come.

Ricky Steamboat (1987)



Steamboat's WrestleMania Record: 3-1

Shawn Michaels (1996)



Michaels' WrestleMania Record: 6-9

1
VS.

Steamboat's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Some 22 years since WrestleMania III rocked the Pontiac Silverdome, many fans still consider Steamboat's classic Intercontinental championship bout against Randy "Macho Man" Savage the greatest match ever contested at WrestleMania. It would have been easy for most anything else on that night's card to be eclipsed by the epic main event pitting Hulk Hogan against Andre the Giant. But, somehow, Savage and Steamboat stole the show with their dramatic and suspenseful grudge match. After numerous near falls, Steamboat small-packaged the "Macho Man" to pick up the victory, and the Intercontinental championship.

Michaels' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Michaels earned the moniker "Mr. WrestleMania" by racking up more memorable moments at the "Granddaddy Of Them All" than almost anyone. But if one moment stood out from the rest, it would have to be Michaels' first world title win at WrestleMania XII. In a grueling one-hour Iron Man match, Michaels went to the time limit with champion Bret Hart without either competitor scoring a single pinfall. But in sudden death overtime, Michaels managed to score the three-count after a superkick, and win the championship. Vince McMahon's call, "A boyhood dream has become a reality for Shawn Michaels," still echoes in the annals of WrestleMania history.

Why It's A Dream Match: Passionate. Exciting. Gifted. Those three words sum up both Michaels and Steamboat. Michaels debuted as one-half of The Rockers just months after Steamboat ended his first WWE tour in 1988. From

there, he went on to take part in a series of classic matches with Ric Flair for the NWA World championship. The two men briefly shared a locker room in 1991, when Steamboat returned for a stint as "The Dragon." But it would be after Steamboat retired in 1994 that Michaels would find his biggest successes, winning four world titles and taking part in a number of dream matches. But perhaps none would be dreamier than this one—pitting arguably the most dynamic wrestler of 1970s and '80s against arguably the most dynamic of the '90s and the new millennium. It's no coincidence that—some 20 years apart from each other—both Steamboat and Michaels lay claim to taking part in some of Ric Flair's greatest matches.

What Would Happen: Considering the skill level of both men in their primes, it's a safe bet fans would be in for quite a long contest. So evenly matched are the two that if they wrestled 100 times, each would probably win about 50 matches. But, on the biggest stage of them all, the advantage has to go to Shawn Michaels. There is no greater pressure-cooker in the sport than WrestleMania, and while Steamboat may have performed in front of the biggest 'Mania audience in history at WrestleMania III, few wrestlers have shown more grace under fire than Shawn Michaels in his 15 'Mania matches. Steamboat certainly knows how to score an unexpected pinfall (just ask Randy Savage), but his flying bodypress finisher would be too easy for Michaels to forecast. Conversely, Sweet Chin Music can come out of nowhere, and would likely leave "The Dragon" counting the lights.

Batista (2005)

2
VS.

Ultimate Warrior (1990)



Batista's WrestleMania Record: 3-1



Warrior's WrestleMania Record: 4-1

Batista's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: During Evolution's two-year run, Batista assumed the role of the quiet enforcer—and Triple-H liked it that way. But when Batista's star began to outshine his mentor's, Triple-H quickly tried to put "The Animal" in his place. Batista, however, was determined to make it on his own. And after winning the 2005 Royal Rumble, he put the WWE World champion firmly in his cross-hairs, even at the expense of dissolving what was left of the powerful faction. In the main event of WrestleMania 21, with the Los Angeles crowd strongly on his side, Batista powerbombed Triple-H to win his first world title and cement his place as a force to be reckoned with.

Warrior's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: For the better part of a decade, the notion of anybody defeating Hulk Hogan in a match—much less at WrestleMania—seemed farfetched. But at WrestleMania VI's "Ultimate Challenge," the Warrior did the impossible. After kicking out of Hogan's legdrop finisher, the Warrior scored with his big splash for the three-count, and the WWF World championship. But perhaps the Warrior's greatest WrestleMania moment came after the pin, when 60,000-plus fans at Toronto's SkyDome embraced their new champion with cheers, and Hogan passed the torch—and championship belt—to his heroic successor.

Why It's A Dream Match: From the thundering entrance music, to the rope-shaking displays of intensity, to the awesome feats of strength, Batista and The Ul-

timate Warrior have a lot in common. Some 15 years separate the primes of each wrestler, and yet both have had a similar impact on the wrestling landscape. During his peak years, Warrior had the unenviable task of following the reign of arguably the biggest star wrestling has ever produced. Similarly, Batista had his naysayers when he took the reigns from Triple-H—a seasoned veteran, masterful competitor, and locker room leader. And so a contest between the two would certainly beg a number of intriguing questions. Who is more powerful? Who would fans get behind? One thing is certain: Even in the largest domed stadium, this match would be sure to blow the roof off.

What Would Happen: Of course, you shouldn't expect much in the way of technical wrestling. Indeed, a collision between these behemoths would feature plenty of displays of raw power and aggression. And while Batista may have more tools in his arsenal and more world titles on his resume, the Warrior displayed a trait that led him to tremendous success and that few others have matched: inner strength. While some fans may have snickered at the image of the Warrior talking into his hands, or up toward the arena ceiling during his matches, it was the Warrior's spirituality that allowed him to tap into the reserves necessary to pull out victory from almost certain defeat. And after undoubtedly taking the beating of a lifetime from "The Animal," the Warrior would hoist Batista over his head and drop him, and then come down with a splash for the victory.

Andre the Giant (1985)

3
VS.

The Big Show (2008)



Andre's WrestleMania Record: **2-3-1**



Big Show's WrestleMania Record: **1-7**

Photo by George Napolitano

Andre's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: At WrestleMania 2, WWE attempted to answer the age-old question, "Which is tougher, the pro wrestler or the pro football player?" To that end, Chicago's Rosemont Horizon hosted a 20-man over the top rope battle royal that featured stars from both the wrestling ring and the gridiron. Pitted against WWF legends including Pedro Morales and Bruno Sammartino, and NFL greats including William "The Refrigerator" Perry and Ernie Holmes, Andre reigned supreme. Andre tossed out Bret Hart and Jim Neidhart to remain the last man standing, and to solidify his position as the true giant of all pro sports.

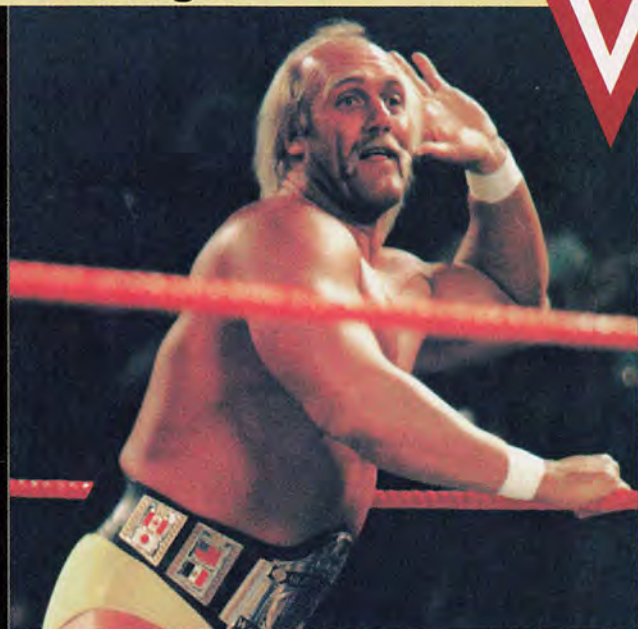
Big Show's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Despite his reputation for dominance, The Big Show has not had a lot of success at WrestleMania. But one must consider the circumstances. Because of his value as a circus-like attraction, on two occasions The Big Show has been put in matches with celebrities in which the odds were stacked against him. Only on one occasion has The Big Show been able to fully showcase his brute strength at WrestleMania. That was at Chicago's WrestleMania 22, where Show and Kane plowed through Carlito and Chris Masters to retain their World tag team championship. Ironically, the match took place in the very same building where Andre won WrestleMania II's battle royal 20 years earlier.

Why It's A Dream Match: Since the day a young Paul "Big Show" Wight made his wrestling debut 13

years ago, the comparisons to Andre the Giant have kept coming. And that's no surprise. At 7 feet tall and more than 500 pounds, both men can lay claim to being among the biggest ever to compete in the squared circle. So similar were the two giants that WCW originally promoted Show as Andre's son. And even today, Show wears the black, single-strapped singlet that Andre made famous. And so the question has long been pondered: Who is the greatest giant ever to compete in the wrestling ring? Just the thought of the two gargantuan warriors standing nose-to-nose in the world's largest staredown is enough to send chills down any spine.

What Would Happen: For starters, the ring would have to be reinforced. Indeed, only WrestleMania would be a fitting stage for such an epic clash. Unfortunately, Andre's prime years came well before the WrestleMania era even began. Even by the time of his legendary showdown with Hulk Hogan at WrestleMania III, the towering Frenchman was already struggling with the wear and tear of supporting his massive frame. Conversely, when Big Show returned from a year-plus hiatus shortly before WrestleMania 24, he appeared to be in the best shape he had been in in a decade. And so, unfortunately, if limited to the years since WrestleMania debuted 24 years ago, the question of who was better in his prime could not be answered. A faster, leaner and more durable Big Show would defeat an aching Andre.

Hulk Hogan (1987)



Hogan's WrestleMania Record: 9-1-1

Steve Austin (1999)



Steve Austin's WrestleMania Record: 5-2

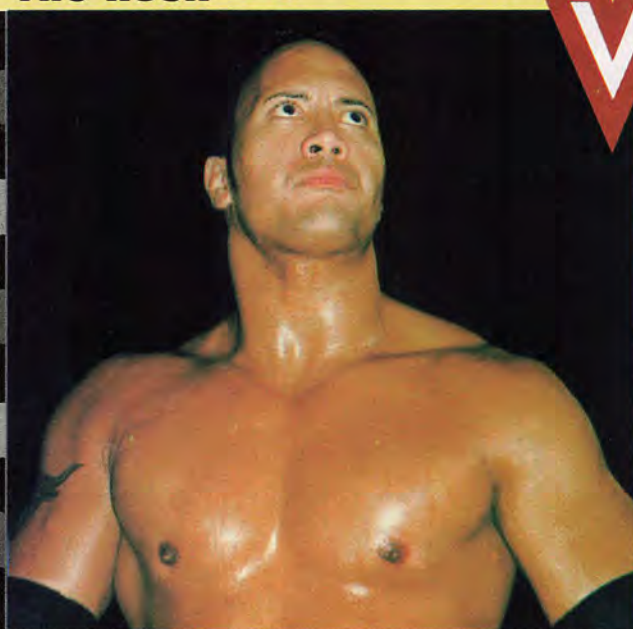
Hogan's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: There are WrestleMania moments, and there is *the* WrestleMania moment. Whether you're a fan of wrestling or not, odds are that you've at least heard of the night Hulk Hogan faced off against Andre the Giant before some 93,000 fans in the Pontiac Silverdome at WrestleMania III. After steamrolling through opponents for three years during his first world title reign, many fans thought Hogan had finally met his match in Andre, a friend-turned-foe who had not lost a match in years. Indeed, Andre seemed to have Hogan's number early on when he scored the nearest of near-falls. But, despite being battered by an opponent 200 pounds heavier than him, Hogan summoned the strength of his Hulkamaniacs when he scooped up Andre and dropped him in what has come to be known as "The Slam Heard Around The World." A three-count soon followed.

Steve Austin's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Steve Austin had WWE fans firmly on his side when he took on The Rock in the main event of WrestleMania XV. But by the time the two men met in a rematch at WrestleMania X-Seven in Houston, fans were torn between two of wrestling's biggest stars. The "Texas Rattlesnake" had two things on his side: A no disqualification stipulation, and a hometown crowd. Sure enough, Austin took advantage of both. Despite using questionable tactics, the fans still cheered Austin as he celebrated his title victory with some beer and the most unlikely of newfound allies—Vince McMahon.

Why It's A Dream Match: Do you really have to ask? Come WrestleMania weekend each year, the chant, "Austin-Hogan!" is bound to break out. It is, arguably, the greatest dream match never to have happened—pitting the two biggest stars in the history of the sport against each other. And what's further frustrated fans over the years is that, unlike so many matches on this list, this one could, theoretically, be put together. While it is true that neither man has seen much ring action in the past six years, fans still hold out hope that Austin and Hogan both have enough gas left in their tanks to make this match a reality. Austin and Hogan, themselves, are not oblivious to the demand. When Hogan made an appearance at the October 2005 "Raw Homecoming," he teased the possibility of the bout. And when the two men shared a stage together at the 2006 WWE Hall of Fame ceremony, Austin made reference to finding a "can of whoop ass" with Hogan's name on it.

What Would Happen: Watching these two megastars go at it at the peak of their popularity would have given Andre vs. Hogan a run for its money as the biggest match ever to take place on American soil. And it would be tough to pick a winner. When they were at their best, both Austin and Hogan rarely looked vulnerable. Hogan had the advantage in strength, while Austin was the better technician. But it might be what Austin lacks that would give him the edge—scruples. While the Hogan of 1987 was all about training, saying his prayers, and eating his vitamins, Austin lived by the motto "don't trust anyone." To that end, we imagine Austin would be willing to go further to get the win.

The Rock (2002)



Rock's WrestleMania Record: 4-4

5
VS.

John Cena (2007)



Cena's WrestleMania Record: 4-1

Photo by George Napolitano

Rock's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Throughout the 1980s and '90s, when fans spoke about dream matches, Hulk Hogan's popularity often made him one-half of any fantasy bout. But Hulkamania was history by time The Rock rose to megastardom in the early part of the new millennium—or so it seemed. When the NWO reformed within WWE in 2002, the stars aligned to allow for one of the biggest marquee matches since Hogan-Warrior or Hogan-Andre. Before a record crowd at Toronto's SkyDome, The Rock squared off in a battle that WWE dubbed "Icon vs. Icon." And on that night, The Rock came out on top.

Cena's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Returning to Detroit for the 20th anniversary of WM III, WWE sought to re-create the majesty at WrestleMania 23. Most of the pieces were in place—a massive dome sure to break attendance records, star power in the form of Donald Trump and other celebrities, and a solid undercard. All that was needed to make WrestleMania 23 one of the biggest events in wrestling history was a main event. To that end, WWE called on its biggest star, John Cena, who defended his WWE championship against Shawn Michaels. Cena went on to retain his title, but perhaps his biggest achievement that night came when made his memorable entrance in a sports car. Indeed, John Cena had arrived.

Why It's A Dream Match: Ask a WWE talent scout what he looks for in a future superstar, and,

before mentioning size, skill, or pedigree, he is likely to bring up the "It" factor. It's been called a lot of things over the years—charisma, star power, self-confidence—but what is certain is that few wrestlers have displayed the "It" factor more than The Rock and John Cena. Their ability to connect with fans through their words, actions, and even just their gestures, propelled both men to the very top of their profession. Like orchestra conductors, The Rock and Cena both showed an incredible ability to hold fans in the palms of their hands. And so it would be hard to imagine the volume of the fans' cheers—or boos—if these two locked up.

What Would Happen: While both The Rock and John Cena have enjoyed almost unparalleled popularity at times, they have also both suffered the inevitable backlash from fans that refuse to drink the proverbial Kool-Aid. But, while The Rock got some jeers in his day, his booing section wasn't nearly as vocal as Cena's has been. Cena has shown an uncanny ability to block out the negativity, but he's also never faced anyone as popular as the "The Great One" was in his prime. And so, it certainly stands to reason The Rock would have a psychological advantage that could knock Cena off his game and allow The Rock to surprise him with a "Rock Bottom" for the win. As for which move would do more damage—the people's elbow or the five-knuckle shuffle—that remains to be seen.

The Road Warriors (1991)



Road Warriors' WrestleMania Record: 3-0

Road Warriors' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Months after returning to WWE in 1997 following a five-year absence, Road Warriors fans began to wonder if the once-dominant duo had lost a step or two. Hawk and Animal had all but disappeared from television in the early part of 1998, leaving fans to believe that the Legion of Doom they knew and loved was gone. In a sense, they were right. The LOD that shocked fans by being announced as the final entrant in WrestleMania XIV's tag team battle royal looked nothing like the one from the past. But LOD 2000—managed by Sunny—proved it was as dominant as ever, mowing through all other contestants and winning the match to become number-one contenders to the tag team championship.

Dudleys' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: It may be hard to believe, but throughout much of wrestling's history, tables were primarily used to give ringside announcers and timekeepers somewhere to put their stuff. That all changed when D-Von and Bubba made tables as commonplace a weapon in the sport as steel chairs or brass knuckles. And so the ultimate testament to the Dudleys' contribution to the foreign object trade came at WrestleMania X-Seven, where the Dudleys took on the Hardy Boyz and Edge and Christian in the now-legendary TLC match. Although the Dudleys came up short, it was victory enough to have some 68,000 rabid fans chanting, "We want tables."

Why It's A Dream Match: It may not produce a definitive answer, but a battle between these two legendary duos might bring us a step closer to answering the age-old

The Dudley Boyz (2001)



Dudleys' WrestleMania Record: 0-4

question: Who is the greatest tag team of all-time? Ironically, the two highly decorated teams boast vastly different records at WrestleMania. Hawk and Animal can lay claim to being undefeated in their three 'Mania appearances, while Bubba Ray and D-Von are winless. But that should not factor into the outcome of this epic clash. Although it was years earlier in the AWA and NWA that The Road Warriors looked most impressive, the LOD never looked as good in WWE as they did in 1991, the year they captured the WWF World tag team championship. Ten years later, the Dudleys were in their prime, winning the WWE World tag team championship five times in 2001 alone.

What Would Happen: Not only are the Dudleys and the LOD two of wrestling's most accomplished teams, but they are also two of the toughest. To that end, a battle between these two smash-mouth tandems would be sure to include plenty of brawling and the liberal use of weaponry. But in the end, we're confident that the bad boys from Chicago would prove just a bit tougher than their Dudleyville counterparts. While the Dudleys may boast having won more than a dozen tag team championships in the U.S. alone, the Warriors have proven more with their three measly reigns as WWE, NWA, and AWA World tag team champions. During their prime, Bubba and D-Von lost their share of matches—as evidenced by the number of title reigns—but Hawk and Animal were as dominant as they come. Plucking off a few wooden splinters out of their massive physiques may serve to only further enrage the LOD, and that could spell Doomsday for the Dudleys.

Roddy Piper (1986)

7
VS.

Chris Jericho (2002)



Piper's WrestleMania Record: 2-3-1



Jericho's WrestleMania Record: 2-6

Piper's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: With a sold-out Madison Square Garden crowd, a massive closed-circuit TV audience, and a list of celebrities ranging from Liberace to Muhammad Ali, the inaugural WrestleMania may have marked the high point of the Rock 'n' Wrestling boom of the 1980s. And at the center of the star-studded spectacular was a trouble-making Scotsman by the name of "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. Months earlier, it was Piper's antagonizing of female rocker Cyndi Lauper and *A-Team* star Mr. T that helped launch the WWF into the mainstream spotlight. On this night, Piper and his partner Paul Orndorff came up short in their tag team main event against Hulk Hogan and T. But Piper's prominent role in the mega event helped cement his place as a wrestling icon.

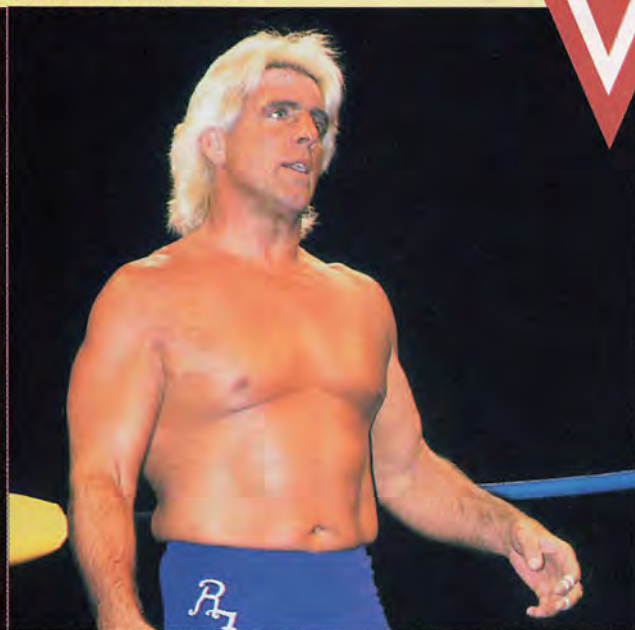
Jericho's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Just a few years before WrestleMania X8, Jericho wondered if he could ever rise above the politics of WCW to reach his potential as a top-tier star. But by the time the big event made it to Toronto in 2002, Jericho was not only in the prominent position of headlining the show, but he did so before a hometown crowd as the defending undisputed World champion. Jericho was defeated in the SkyDome by Triple-H that night, but that the match took place at all was evidence that Chris Jericho had indeed arrived.

Why It's A Dream Match: Both Roddy Piper and Chris Jericho have enjoyed periods of tremendous popularity, but it has been the times they have played the role of antagonist that they have seemed most at home. With his outrageous comments and despicable behavior,

Piper earned the distinction of being one of wrestling's most hated villains of all-time during the mid-'80s. In fact, Piper's antics became so legendary that some have argued that Hulk Hogan owed much of his popularity to Piper, his top foil. But if ever there was a wrestler with a reputation for mischief that could match that of Piper, it might be Jericho. And never was Jericho's head bigger than in 2002, when he reigned over WWE as wrestling's undisputed World champion, and even had heiress to the WWE kingdom, Stephanie McMahon, as his personal cheerleader. A WrestleMania battle between these two baddies might set an all-time record for loudest boos.

What Would Happen: Despite their villainous traits, fans should not necessarily expect both men to throw away the rulebook in this match—at least not at the outset. Both having received some of their training in the famous Hart Dungeon, Piper and Jericho could be reasonably going in to a match with each other with their working shoes on. But, inevitably, the devilish side of both competitors would likely get the better of them, and their battle would deteriorate into a showcase of low blows and cheap shots. If that were the case, Piper might have an advantage—especially with "Cowboy" Bob Orton Jr. in his corner and willing to do whatever it takes to make sure his boss got the win. Nonetheless, we expect Jericho could survive the two-on-one advantage and come out with the victory. While both men may be skilled in the fine art of rulebreaking, Jericho is clearly the superior technician. And, in the end, it is called *WrestleMania*.

Ric Flair (1992)



Flair's WrestleMania Record: 2-4

Flair's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: It's an awfully tall order to deliver a retirement match fitting of arguably the greatest wrestling career there ever was. But, Ric Flair's "career threatening match" against Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania XXIV not only met expectations—it somehow exceeded them. At 59 years old, Flair looked nearly as good as he did during his prime more than 25 years earlier. Although Flair came up short in the match, he had plenty of reason to celebrate. There was no shortage of tears, by both the competitors and the fans, as Flair wrapped up one last brilliant performance in the ring.

Hart's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Throughout his Hall of Fame career, perhaps no victory was sweeter for Bret Hart than the one he gained over Yokozuna at WrestleMania XIII. However, the night didn't start off so sweet for Hart. In the opening match, Hart was defeated by his brother Owen in a bout that took as big an emotional toll on "The Hitman" as it did a physical one. But the setback only made Hart's accomplishment later that night more inspirational. Giving up a nearly 300 pounds in weight, Hart managed to get the three-count on the massive Yokozuna. Before an exuberant Madison Square Garden crowd, and a ring full of supporters, Hart celebrated winning his second World title.

Why It's A Dream Match: Not all dream matches are special because we haven't seen them done before. Sometimes it's a matter of never having seen them done right. That would be the case in a match between Hart

Bret Hart (1994)



Hart's WrestleMania Record: 2-4

and Flair, who have done battle repeatedly both during Flair's stint in WWF in the early-'90s and during Hart's run in WCW later that decade. In fact, it was Flair whom Hart defeated to capture his first WWF World title. But a contest between two of the greatest ring generals who ever lived deserves a bigger stage than it ever got. And so a showdown between "The Hitman" and the "Nature Boy" at WrestleMania would be one for the ages. Only adding fuel to a match between the two men is the real-life verbal jabs they have taken at one another over the years, including in their respective autobiographies. Both legends claim the other is overrated. Perhaps the only way to settle the issue would be in the ring.

What Would Happen: Match quality does not always factor into the ingredients of a dream match, but in this case, fans could rightfully set their expectations high for a classic contest. The 1992 version of Flair was fresh off an inspirational performance at that year's Royal Rumble, where he captured his first WWF World championship. And Hart's renowned career probably reached its peak in 1994—a year in which he enjoyed his longest world title reign and took part in mat classics against his brother Owen. With Flair having been 43 during his 'Mania peak, and Hart having been 37, age wouldn't be much of a factor in this dream match. Nevertheless, for all of Flair's greatness, the "Nature Boy" was always prone to having his shoulders pinned to the mat, whereas Hart's record as a WWF main-eventer was shining. So we'll pick "The Hitman" in a match that that could easily last an hour—a glorious hour at that.

Randy Savage (1988)



Savage's WrestleMania Record: **7-4**

9
VS.

Edge (2008)



Edge's WrestleMania Record: **5-2**

Photo by George Napolitano

Savage's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Plenty of wrestlers have won world titles at WrestleMania, but only one can lay claim to winning four separate matches in a single night to become world champion, and that's Randy Savage. Following Hulk Hogan's controversial WWF World title loss to Andre the Giant earlier in 1988, the title was held up to be decided in a one-night tournament at WrestleMania IV in Atlantic City. While some fans were disappointed when the popular Hogan was eliminated from the tournament by disqualification earlier in the night, the "Macho Man" won them over through his inspirational wins against Butch Reed, Greg Valentine, One Man Gang, and Ted DiBiase to earn the championship.

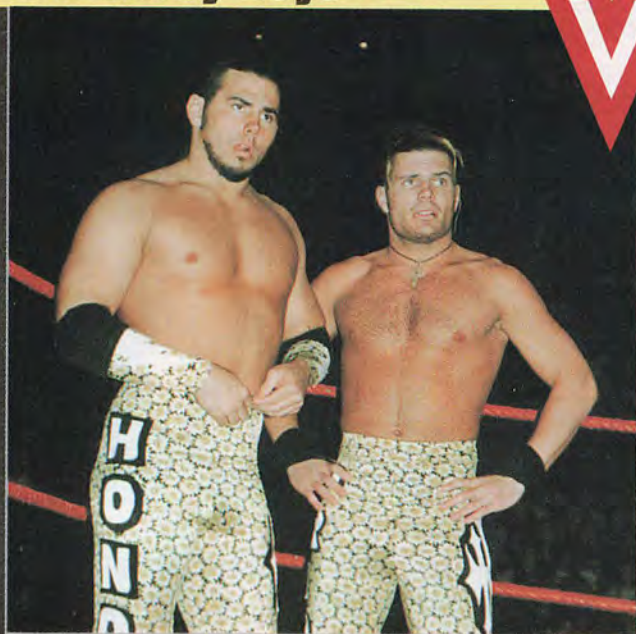
Edge's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: It was an idea first devised by Chris Jericho—a six-man ladder match at WrestleMania 21 with the winner earning a guaranteed world title shot at any time of his choosing over the next 12 months. But it was Edge that first made the match famous by besting Jericho, Chris Benoit, Kane, Shelton Benjamin, and Christian to become the inaugural "Money In The Bank" match winner. For 10 months, Edge and his prized briefcase were inseparable until the "Rated R Superstar" cashed it in and won his first world title. And so it can be said that "The Ultimate Opportunist" was born on the night of WrestleMania 21.

Why It's A Dream Match: Lots of wrestlers talk a good game, but not all are able to back it up. In the case of both Randy Savage and Edge, their gifts of

gab are exceeded only by their gifts in the ring. And so a showdown between the two multiple-time world champions on a stage as big as WrestleMania would surely deliver not only a heck of an athletic contest, but also several weeks worth of compelling microphone. In his feuds with the likes of Hulk Hogan, Jake Roberts, and Ric Flair, Savage displayed a kind of intensity in his pre-match interviews that would drive fans to spend top dollar to see a score settled. Similarly, few wrestlers today can rile up an audience with their words like Edge. But make no mistake—it's what these two competitors would deliver in the ring that makes this an absolute dream match.

What Would Happen: It's not only verbal abilities that make these two competitors ideal opponents. Their primes separated by some 20 years, Savage and Edge both were among the most well-rounded competitors of their time. They were capable of soaring off the top rope, brawling at ringside, and putting on technical wrestling showcases. And so a match between them could take many shapes. A battle between the Edge of 2008 and the "Macho Man" of 1988 would also have to factor another important ingredient—or rather two of them. The lovely Miss Elizabeth would surely be in the corner of Savage, while the conniving Vickie Guerrero would second her beau, Edge. And while both men were not above using any other tactic necessary to win a match, Savage was far more dominant during 1988—the year his 12-month World title reign began—than Edge ever has been. "Macho Madness" would rule the day.

The Hardy Boys (2000)



Hardys' WrestleMania Record: 0-3

Hardys' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Shawn Michaels and Razor Ramon may get credit for introducing the ladder match to most WWE fans, but it was the Hardy Boyz that were largely responsible for bringing the specialty match back in vogue at the beginning of this decade. After beating Edge and Christian in a spectacular ladder match five months earlier at 1999's No Mercy, the two teams brought their breathtaking act to the biggest stage of all—WrestleMania 2000. The Dudley Boyz were added to the mix to make it a triangle ladder match. Edge and Christian won the affair, but through their daredevil antics, The Hardy Boyz showcased why they were the most exciting tag team of the new millennium.

Bulldogs' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: With several distractions in the way of NFL players wrestling, wrestlers boxing, and celebrities doing everything from refereeing matches to ringing bells, it seemed that actual quality wrestling was low on the list of priorities at WrestleMania II. But when they entered the ring for their match against Brutus Beefcake and Greg Valentine, The British Bulldogs seemingly had two goals in mind—capturing the Dream Team's tag team championship and putting on a heck of a match. With their manager, Capt. Lou Albano, and rock icon Ozzy Osbourne in their corner, the Bulldogs won their only WWF World tag team championship that night, and delivered one of the best matches of the early WrestleMania era.

Why It's A Dream Match: Sometimes a dream match is about finding out which contestant is better.

10 VS.

The British Bulldogs (1996)



Bulldogs' WrestleMania Record: 1-2

Sometimes it's a matter of just wanting to see two legends share a ring. And sometimes, you just want a thrill ride. The latter would be the case in this match, which would pit two of the most dynamic tag teams the sport has ever known against each other. A WrestleMania battle between these two duos would surely include generous amounts of dazzling team work, jaw-dropping aerial maneuvers, and stunning displays of technical expertise. And with both teams traditionally having competed on the right side of the law, fans could expect them to share a tremendous amount of respect for one another—ensuring a fair, if spirited, contest.

What Would Happen: Assuming a match between these two teams would likely take place in the middle of a dream WrestleMania card, the night's headliners would have plenty of reason to worry about the show being stolen. It's hard to imagine a scenario in which the Hardys and Bulldogs would not tear the house down if they ever shared a ring together. From the Dynamite Kid's lightning fast suplexes, to Jeff Hardy's death-defying aerial maneuvers, this match would surely showcase some of the sport's most exhilarating offenses. But only one team could win in the end. It's a close call, but the strength advantage of the Bulldogs—particularly Smith's—could be the deciding factor in a match against the gutsy, but undersized, Hardy Boys. Regardless of who came out on top, we'd expect plenty of handshakes and hugs at the end of this contest, and fulfillment in delivering a memorable match.

Wendi Richter (1985)



Richter's WrestleMania Record: **1-0**

11
VS.

Trish Stratus (2006)



Stratus' WrestleMania Record: **2-2**

Richter's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: There's little doubt that the top star of the 1980s Rock 'n' Wrestling era was Hulk Hogan. But holding second place to that claim may have been an uncharacteristically lovely wrestling star. With her good looks and exciting wrestling style, Wendi Richter rose to become one of the WWF's most popular attractions in the mid-'80s. So hot was the southern belle that she was put in the prestigious position of wrestling in the semi-main event of the first WrestleMania. With rock star Cyndi Lauper in her corner, Richter defeated Lelani Kai to capture her second WWE Women's championship.

Stratus' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: When she made her WWE debut in 2000, there was little reason to believe that former fitness model Trish Stratus could rise to become any more than just another sexy female manager standing at ringside to cheer on her charge. But, through hard work and determination, Stratus eventually rose to become one of the most talented female wrestlers of the modern era. And in one of the biggest victories of her shining career, Stratus defeated Jazz and Victoria in a triple threat match at WrestleMania XIX to capture her fourth Women's title before some 54,000 fans in Seattle's Safeco Field.

Why It's A Dream Match: A quick scan through the roster of SHIMMER or through Japanese pro wrestling locker rooms of the 1990s would likely produce more skilled female wrestlers than Stratus and Richter. But it would be quite hard to find two more popular ones. Sharing the spotlight with megastars of the 1980s, including Hogan

and Andre the Giant, Richter broke through wrestling's glass ceiling to be nearly as popular as any man in the WWF at the time. She was even a featured part of the Saturday morning cartoon *Hulk Hogan's Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection*. About two decades later, Stratus similarly found herself on the same roster with such charismatic giants as The Rock and "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. And she too was able to rise to become one of the most beloved superstars of her time. And so, while the action could be plenty good, it is the star power of these two female wrestling icons that would make this bout a legitimate dream match.

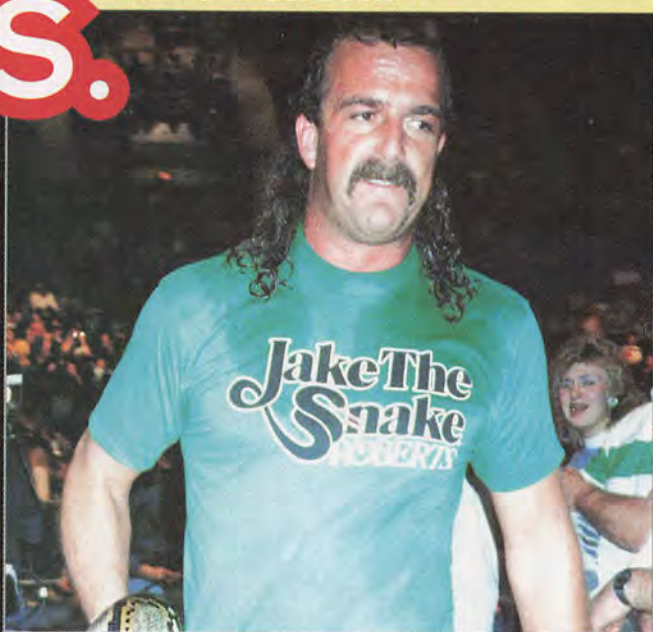
What Would Happen: Although several decades separate several of the participants in many of the dream matches on this list, perhaps nowhere would the wrestling generation gap be more apparent than here. The standards for WWF women's wrestling in 1985 were worlds apart from those of the modern era. And while Richter may have found great success against opponents like the Fabulous Moolah and Judy Martin, she would likely find herself way over her head in a match against Stratus. Stratus' array of astounding maneuvers, including her chick kick and headscissors takeover variations, would outstrip Richter's move set. And although she retired from full-time competition at the young age of 31, Stratus would have a considerable experience advantage on Richter, especially on the WrestleMania stage. Though tremendously popular in her prime, Richter's WWF run lasted just two years, and included far less competition than Stratus saw in her six years in WWE.

Triple-H (2003)



Triple-H's WrestleMania Record: **5-7**

Jake Roberts (1989)



Roberts' WrestleMania Record: **3-4-1**

12
VS.

Triple-H's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: For the first 15 years of WrestleMania, the biggest show of the year always concluded with a happy ending. That usually meant WWE's number-one fan favorite celebrating a victory in a main event world championship match. And so, going into WrestleMania 2000, fans were confident that it would be the company's top active star at the time, The Rock, that would best WWF World champ Triple-H, The Big Show, and Mick Foley in a four-man elimination match. But, with a little help from Vince McMahon, Triple-H pulled off the seemingly impossible and won the bout to retain his title. It was the first time a rule breaker won the main event of WrestleMania.

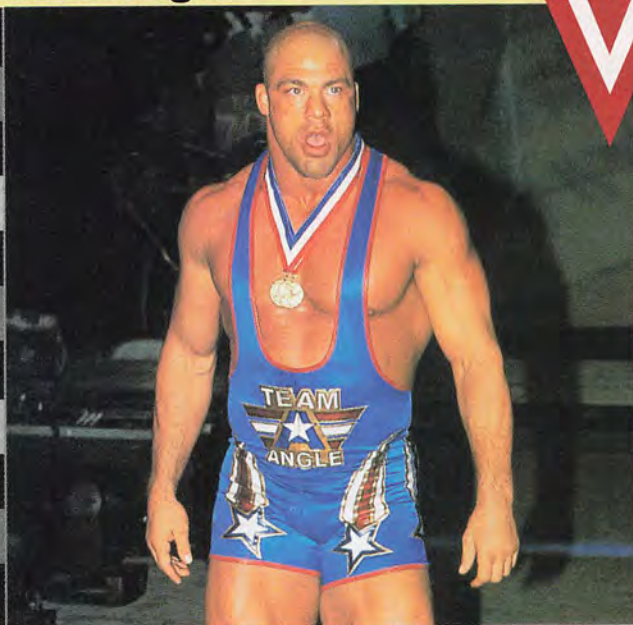
Roberts' Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Come WrestleMania time each year, Jake "The Snake" Roberts could usually find himself embroiled in an intensely personal rivalry. Unfortunately, whether it was against The Honky Tonk Man at WrestleMania III, Rick Rude at WrestleMania IV, or Ted DiBiase at WrestleMania VI, victory on the big stage was often elusive for "The Snake." And so it would have been easy to bet against Roberts at WrestleMania VII, where he took on Rick "The Model" Martel in a blindfold match. Months earlier, Martel temporarily blinded Roberts by spraying cologne in his eyes. With the fan's cheers guiding him through the match, Roberts managed to DDT Martel to gain the victory, and a measure of revenge.

Why It's A Dream Match: Before Triple-H was assassinating cerebrums, Jake Roberts was luring in vulnerable victims by assuring them, "Trust me." And so a battle

between two of wrestling's most conniving ring psychologists would most certainly have the makings of a dream match. Roberts, who struggled through much of his career with his personal demons, reached the peak of his conditioning, and his popularity, in 1989—a year in which he found success in feud against his most formidable opponent, Andre the Giant. And Triple-H was nearly unstoppable in WWE in 2003—a year in which he successfully defended his World championship against Booker T at WrestleMania XIX, and lead Evolution to become WWE's most dominant force. And so this match would not only feature both participants at their physical peaks, but also their psychological ones. We imagine the mind games would start weeks before the match ever got into the ring.

What Would Happen: A quick glance at a tale of the tape would make Triple-H the clear favorite in this match. He's bigger, stronger, more technically sound, and achieved far greater success than Roberts had during his career. But the reason this qualifies as a dream match at all is the same reason that a clear winner is not so apparent. The psychological tactics that could be waged by either man could turn the betting odds on their ear. Whether it's encouraging the fans' deafening cheers, or gesturing toward the satchel containing his python, Damian, at ringside, Roberts would be sure to do all he could to try to psych out "The Game," and disarm him long just enough to trap him in the DDT. But Roberts would have his work more than cut out for him against Triple-H, who would be less vulnerable to mind games than Roberts' other foes. A Pedigree would be enough to put "The Snake" in the bag.

Kurt Angle (2003)



Angle's WrestleMania Record: **3-5**

Curt Hennig (1991)



Hennig's WrestleMania Record: **1-4**

13
VS.

Angle's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: One WrestleMania dream need not be on this list, because it already happened. At WrestleMania 21, Kurt Angle took on Shawn Michaels in a battle that had all the makings of a true dream match. And so fans' mouths watered at the prospect of this 2005 battle. As is the case in every match on this list, a dream match should have a clear winner. And on this night, that winner was Angle, who made Michaels tap out to his anklelock. If for only one night, Angle had earned the distinction in many fans' eyes as the best of the best.

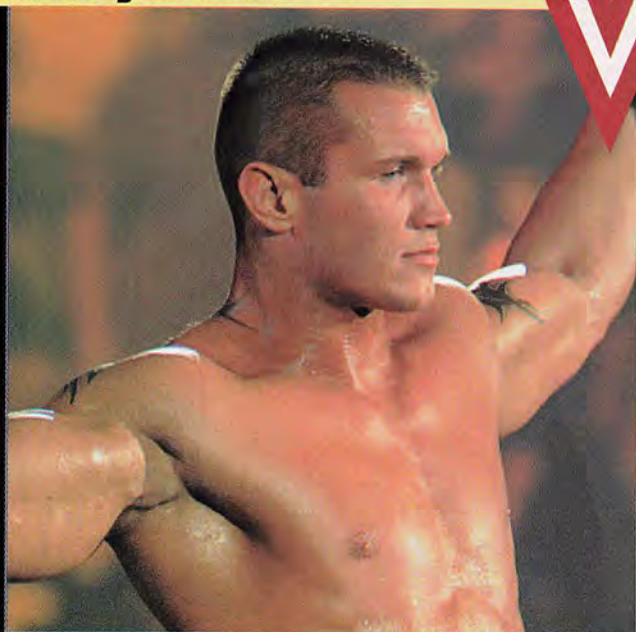
Hennig's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Is it possible for a wrestler's greatest WrestleMania moment to have occurred off of the main card? We say that's the case with "Mr. Perfect", who may have cherished no 'Mania memory more than his 2002 dark match at WrestleMania X8. Nearly a decade after he competed at his last WrestleMania—and long after most fans had written him off—"Perfect" had returned to WWE, and earned himself a spot on the SkyDome show before 68,000 fans. Teaming with Lance Storm, Hennig lost against Rikishi and Scotty 2 Hotty. But, in his last major match before his untimely death less than a year later, he offered some glimpses into how he earned his name.

Why It's A Dream Match: With a similar size, look, and mat-based wrestling style, Angle and "Mr. Perfect" might have made ideal tag team partners if only Angle were born 10 years earlier, or Hennig 10 years later. They also would have made ideal opponents, and WrestleMania

would be the perfect venue for a dream match between these two ring greats. "Perfect" did some of his best work in 1991, a year in which he held the Intercontinental championship for eight months and took part in a classic contest against Bret Hart. Angle looked similarly terrific in 2003, wearing the WWE championship for the first four months of the year. Ironically, during those years, both men also delivered some of the best matches of their career while battling career-threatening injuries. And so a match between these two ring technicians would not only have a high content of quality wrestling, but also of heart.

What Would Happen: Dream WrestleMania fans, stay in your seats. This may be the best match of the night. This combination of two of wrestling's most athletically gifted performers would be almost sure to produce a five-star classic, filled with innovative moves and reversals, painful submission holds, and dramatic near falls. "Perfect" would no doubt target Angle's questionable neck with moves like his rolling neck snap, and his signature Perfect-plex fisherman's suplex. Meanwhile, Angle would likely go after Hennig's suspect back with his Angle slam. But none of that is to say that fans should expect each wrestler's usual formula. With an Olympic gold medalist and a man who claims to be "perfect" sharing a ring, fans could count on both wrestlers going above and beyond the call of duty not only to win the match, but to prove their reputations for greatness. Unfortunately for Hennig, Angle would be a little greater, and would win this match.

Randy Orton (2008)



Orton's WrestleMania Record: **1-3**

14
VS.

Bruno Sammartino (1986)



Sammartino's WrestleMania Record: **0-1**

Orton's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Randy Orton stepped into a virtual lion's den at WrestleMania 24, where he had the formidable task of defending his WWE championship against two of WWE's most popular stars in the form of John Cena and Triple-H. With WrestleMania usually being the stage for WWE's most heroic victories, few people gave the sinister Orton a chance. But Orton withstood the offense of both his opponents, and took advantage of a perfect opportunity after Triple-H gave Cena the Pedigree. He punt kicked Triple-H out of the way and covered Cena for the upset win.

Sammartino's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: If, in the world of baseball, Yankee Stadium is "The House That Ruth Built," then in the world of wrestling, you might call Madison Square Garden "The House That Sammartino Built." So it must have been a uniquely special moment for the "Living Legend" to return to the building for the inaugural WrestleMania, where he seconded his son David in a match against Brutus Beefcake. And although he was not a participant in the match, the elder Sammartino did get to relive old times when he mixed it up in the ring with Beefcake's manager, Johnny Valiant. If for just a moment, Bruno was once again king of MSG.

Why It's A Dream Match: Orton's moniker of the "Legend Killer" is not one he takes lightly. Since debuting in WWE some seven years ago, Orton has gone to great lengths to humble some of the greatest names ever to grace a wrestling ring—Harley Race, Dusty Rhodes, Ric Flair, and Hulk Hogan have all felt the wrath of Orton.

But one legend on Orton's list of targets has remained conspicuously absent, and that's Bruno Sammartino. With two W/WWF World championship reigns that totaled an incredible 11 years, and a reputation for selling out Madison Square Garden for most of his title defenses, Sammartino's greatness is undeniable. Even today, Orton would no doubt love to humiliate Sammartino in front of a camera. For a match against an in-shape Sammartino of 23 years ago, Orton would probably give anything. And for his part, Sammartino would most certainly not mind silencing a young punk like Orton.

What Would Happen: Limited to the WrestleMania era, Sammartino would be inevitably a decade past his peak career years when he entered this match. But that doesn't necessarily mean he would be easy pickings for Orton. In 1986, Sammartino enjoyed quite the comeback, competing in some memorable tag team matches against the likes of Randy "Macho Man" Savage and Adrian Adonis, and holding his own in WrestleMania II's 20-man battle royal. Because Sammartino was never one for finesse, most of his arsenal of strikes and power moves were still effective even in the mid-'80s. Perhaps more importantly, Sammartino was never easily intimidated. So while Orton's posturing and cold stares may be enough to rattle some opponents, it would likely only earn him a knuckle sandwich from the Italian fan favorite. All that said, we have to be realistic. Taking nothing away from Sammartino, he would be in the ring with one of the best, and meanest, competitors in the world—and one nearly half his age. And Sammartino would lose.

Brock Lesnar (2003)



Lesnar's WrestleMania Record: 1-1

**15
VS.**

Bobby Lashley (2007)



Lashley's WrestleMania Record: 1-1

Lesnar's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: For the elite group of wrestlers who have been lucky enough to compete in the main event of a WrestleMania, it has likely taken them years of toiling in the mid-card before reaching that career pinnacle. That is, unless, your name is Brock Lesnar. Just a year after debuting in WWE the night after WrestleMania X8, Lesnar found himself making his WrestleMania debut in the main event. At 2003's WrestleMania XIX, Lesnar took on WWE champion Kurt Angle in a contest that many considered a dream match in its own right. And after nearly breaking his own neck in a botched shooting star press, Lesnar found the wherewithal to hoist Angle into his patented F5 to win the match and the title.

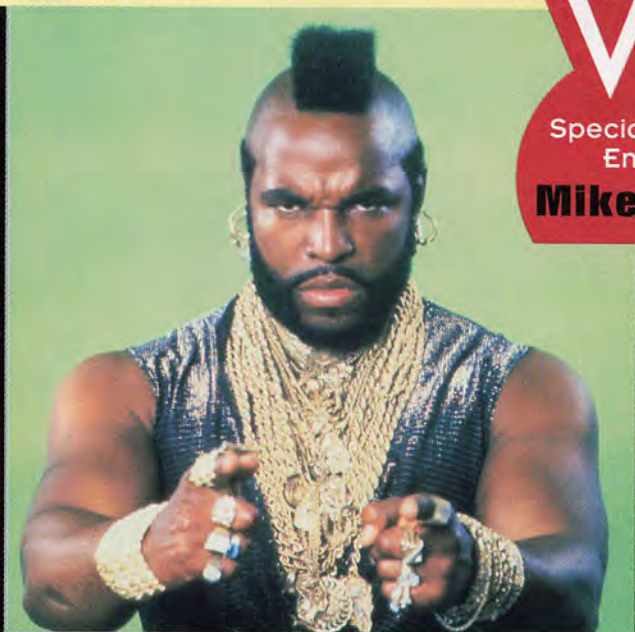
Lashley's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: It was of the most lasting icons in modern wrestling history—Vince McMahon's hair. And in 2007, the WWE chairman did the unthinkable by putting his thick mane on the line against that of Donald Trump at WrestleMania 23. With the match gaining considerable publicity, its contestants were sure to become mainstream stars nearly overnight. McMahon chose Umaga to represent him, and the prestigious position of Trump's rep went to Lashley. The former U.S. Army sergeant won the match, and then took part in one of the most watched moments in wrestling history when he helped shave McMahon bald.

Why It's A Dream Match: So similar have been the career paths of Brock Lesnar and Bobby Lashley, that it's almost eerie. Both were national champions in amateur wrestling. Both made the transition into pro wrestling

and joined WWE. Both won major championships within their first year in the company. And despite making a major impact, the pro wrestling careers of both men were both relatively short. What's more, both men have since found success in the mixed martial arts world since departing from WWE. So a battle between Lesnar and Lashley could answer the question: Who is the best collegiate amateur wrestler-turned pro wrestler-turned mix martial artist? These two just missed crossing paths in WWE, which Lesnar left in 2004, and Lashley joined in 2005, so this pairing came a lot closer to happening than most on this list. Who knows? Maybe it still could, whether it's in the ring or the Octagon.

What Would Happen: It's not only the resumes of Brock Lesnar and Bobby Lashley that are strikingly similar, but their ring styles as well. With their imposing physiques, both men might be mistaken at first glance for purely power wrestlers. But on the contrary, Lesnar and Lashley were both among the most athletic WWE competitors of their respective times—capable of leaving their feet with the grace of a cruiserweight, and coming off the top rope with remarkable ease. And so despite qualifying as super heavyweights, this contest would be far from lumbering. What we would be certain to see in this match is a high dose of amateur wrestling—the foundation of these two former collegiate stars. All things being equal, Lesnar would be the favorite to win this match. While Lesnar actually spent less time in WWE than Lashley did, he accomplished considerably more during his pro wrestling career.

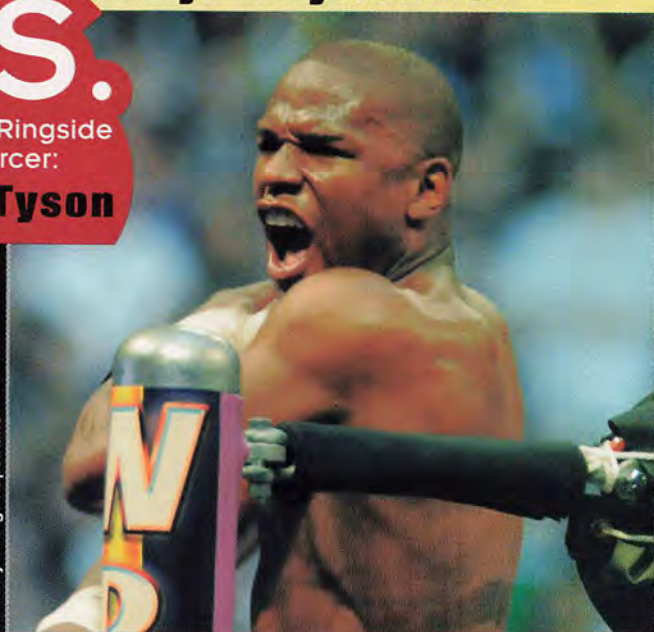
Mr. T (1985)



Mr. T's WrestleMania Record: **2-0**

16
VS.
Special Ringside
Enforcer:
Mike Tyson

Floyd Mayweather (2008)



Mayweather's WrestleMania Record: **1-0**

Photo by George Napolitano

Mr. T's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Depending on the success of the first WrestleMania, the WWF may have been destined to either take a giant leap in its national expansion, or go bankrupt. And with all the promotion's eggs in one basket, it was essential that the event not only capture the interest of pro wrestling fans, but also have enough mainstream appeal to be sold to the masses. To that end, WWF called on one of the biggest stars in television and film at the time, Mr. T. The 1980s pop culture icon teamed with Hulk Hogan to defeat Paul Orndorff and Roddy Piper in the main event of the show. It was a tremendous success, and helped launch the WWF into becoming the juggernaut it is today.

Mayweather's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: As the story goes, Floyd Mayweather attended 2008's No Way Out only to support his friend, Rey Mysterio Jr., as he challenged for the WWE World championship. But when a returning Big Show called out the champion boxer, he answered the call with a series of punches that broke the giant's nose and made national headlines. That set the stage for a WrestleMania 24 match that was billed as "The Biggest vs. The Best." And, despite giving up more than 300 pounds to his opponent, Mayweather—with the help of brass knuckles—knocked out Show and picked up the win.

Why It's A Dream Match: For better or for worse, celebrities have been a part of WrestleMania since the beginning. And while Hollywood stars and sports legends have frequently played ancillary roles at the annual event, only a handful have gone as far as to actually compete in the ring. Two of

the gutsiest have been Mr. T and Mayweather, who have both laced up the boots and done battle at WrestleMania. Even more impressively, despite being out of their element, both men have picked up victories in their respective WrestleMania matches. And since the involvement of these crossover stars helped make the WrestleManias in which they were involved seem special, it only stands to reason that an "all-star" battle between two of 'Mania's most impactful celebrities could draw some interest. In case there wasn't enough star power in this bout, we've decided to throw "Iron" Mike Tyson in the same enforcer role that he had in the main event of WrestleMania XIV—an event he helped make a big success.

What Would Happen: Wrestling purists might roll their eyes at the notion that there would be any real athletic value to this match, but they should not be so quick to judge. In his first WrestleMania match, teaming with Hulk Hogan against Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff, Mr. T displayed some impressive amateur wrestling technique. And nobody could question Mayweather's qualifications as a world-class fighter. Taking into account Mr. T's boxing match victory over Piper at WrestleMania II, and Tyson's involvement at ringside, and this match might be better off taking place in a boxing ring than a wrestling one. But, assuming this battle was contested under standard pro wrestling rules, Mr. T would have the experience advantage. As for the ringside enforcer, Tyson might have his work cut out for him in preventing outside interference from another pro athlete who might take issue with being left out of a WrestleMania celebrity match—Lawrence Taylor.

Rey Mysterio Jr. (2006)



Mysterio's WrestleMania Record: 1-3

17
VS.

Tito Santana (1985)



Santana's WrestleMania Record: 2-7

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Mysterio's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Because there are no weight divisions in WWE, the "heavyweight championship" has always been something of a misnomer. But even the smallest of men to wear the belt have measured over 6' and weighed more than 200 pounds. And so the notion of a 5'6", 175-pound cruiserweight wearing the strap might have been enough to make many fans and wrestlers alike laugh. But sure enough, Mysterio did the seemingly impossible at WrestleMania 22 when he defeated Randy Orton and Kurt Angle to become the smallest world champion in WWE history. Mysterio proved that while his body might be small, his heart was gigantic.

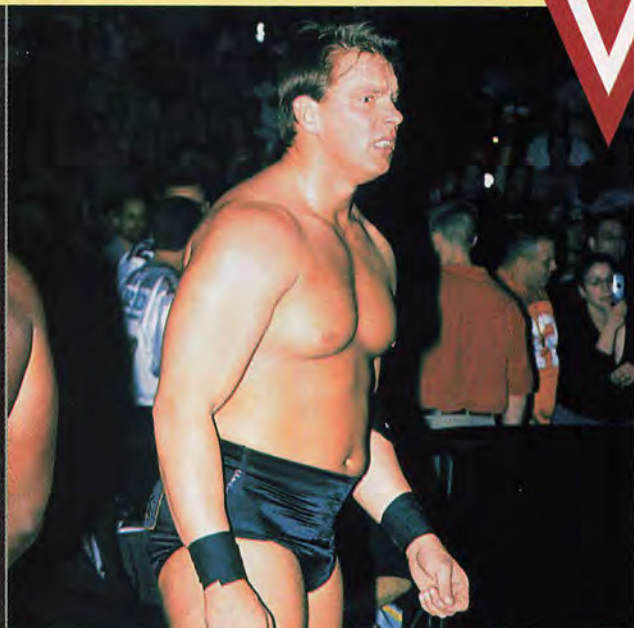
Santana's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: There have been nearly 250 matches contested at WrestleMania over the last 24 years, but there will always be one first. 1985's inaugural WrestleMania kicked off with Tito Santana taking on The Executioner ("Playboy" Buddy Rose under a mask). In an event with so much on the line, it was a huge vote of confidence that Santana was given the job of making a first impression on WrestleMania viewers. Santana not only competed in the very first 'Mania match, he also won it—forcing The Executioner to submit to his figure-four lock.

Why It's A Dream Match: "Fiery Mexican warrior with the heart of a champion" might be an ideal description for both contestants in this dream match. What's more, both men have played a big part at WrestleMania during two very different generations. Before The Undertaker's

WrestleMania streak became the stuff of legends, Santana had a streak of his own going at WrestleMania. While his win-loss record was less than stellar, Santana competed at the first nine 'Manias—a testament to his reputation as one of the most durable competitors of the '80s and early-'90s (the only other person to be in the first nine 'Mania's was Hulk Hogan). Similarly, Mysterio's dazzling ring style injected new energy in WrestleMania starting with his debut at the event in 2003. And in 2006, Mysterio reached the pinnacle of the sport when he won the WWE World championship at WrestleMania 22. So a contest between these two would not only feature lots of fast-moving action, it would be a showcase for two of WrestleMania's most important unsung heroes.

What Would Happen: Every WrestleMania needs an opening match, and this contest would render the term "curtain jerker" complimentary. With both Santana and Mysterio employing a high-flying style that incorporates the lucha libre style of their native country, fans could expect an exciting affair marked by lots of rope-running, top-rope maneuvers, and dives out to the ringside area. Santana may have the size advantage against Mysterio, but then, who doesn't? Like he has done to so many opponents, Mysterio would run Santana ragged with his blinding speed, before trapping his exhausted foe in a 619 and West Coast Pop for the victory. Fans would no doubt be on their feet for this one from bell to bell. And the mutual respect between the opponents would ensure a battle every bit as honorable as it would be thrilling.

JBL (2005)



JBL's WrestleMania Record: 3-6

**18
VS.**

Kevin (Diesel) Nash (1995)



Diesel's WrestleMania Record: 2-0

JBL's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: After nearly a decade of languishing in WWE's mid-card, John Bradshaw Layfield's appearance at WrestleMania 21 as the defending WWE champion should have been the greatest WrestleMania moment of his career. But instead, the event will more likely be remembered as the night John Cena won his world title by defeating JBL. And so redemption was on Layfield's mind when he stepped in the ring against U.S. champion Chris Benoit at 2006's WrestleMania 22. Indeed, JBL regained his good name—and some championship gold—by defeating Benoit before the Chicago crowd.

Diesel's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: When he appeared at a WrestleMania for the first time in 1994, most fans likely didn't think much of the towering bodyguard who seconded Shawn Michaels in his ladder match against Razor Ramon. But just a year later, Diesel found himself in the prestigious spot of defending the WWF World championship against Michaels at WrestleMania XI. With Football legend Lawrence Taylor's involvement in the show drawing a lot of mainstream attention to the event, it was doubly important that "Big Daddy Cool" put on a good showing. He did just that, defeating Michaels in a contest voted 1995's Match of the Year by *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* readers.

Why It's A Dream Match: Since the beginning of time, the battle of the big men has been a staple in the sport of pro wrestling. And this contest would pit

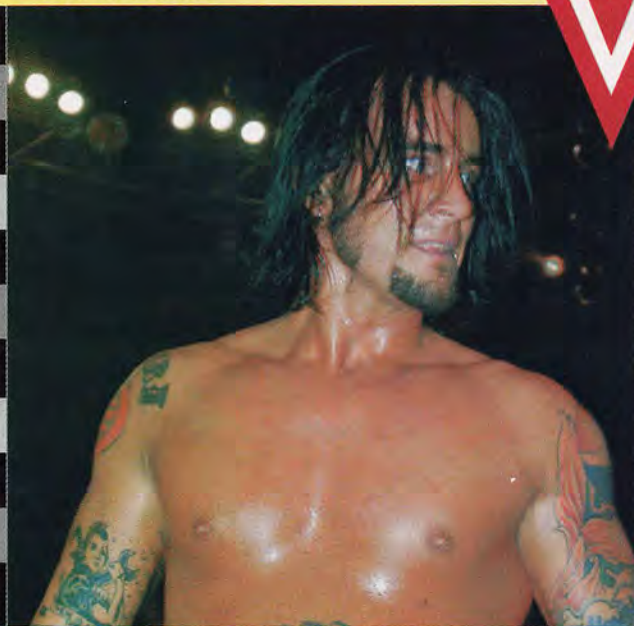
two of the biggest and roughest men ever to step foot in the squared circle. Like so many of the wrestlers matched up on this list, these two opponents have a lot in common. Both were unlikely titleholders when they captured their world titles. And both went on to silence their critics by holding on to the belt for nearly a year. In fact, Layfield's 2004-2005 reign was the longest since Diesel's 1994-1995 reign. And while both competitors may not be the most graceful the sport has known, their drive to make fans forget all about "Vinnie Vegas" and "Justin Hawk Bradshaw" may lead them to give their very best in this epic battle.

What Would Happen: Fans at ringside should beware of flying teeth. With both JBL and Diesel employing the kind of smashmouth style best suited for a barroom fight, this one could get pretty stiff, pretty quickly. The two traits that might factor most prominently into this match would be strength and toughness. Who could throw the harder punch, and who could better take it? Diesel displayed his toughness at WrestleMania XII, when he came closer to defeating The Undertaker at WrestleMania than anyone before him. Similarly, Layfield showed that he is not one to be messed with when he beat Finlay in an aggressive Belfast Brawl at WrestleMania 24. With both of men's grit unquestioned, this match might be decided on the contestants' power. And if that were the case, JBL would find himself going for a ride on Diesel's jackknife power bomb, and subsequently being knocked out.

C.M. Punk (2008)

19
VS.

Mick Foley (1998)



Punk's WrestleMania Record: **1-1**



Foley's WrestleMania Record: **2-3-1**

Punk's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: After winning the ECW championship and competing at WrestleMania 23 all within his first year in WWE, some fans expected C.M. Punk to experience something of a sophomore jinx in 2008. They couldn't have been more wrong. Punk went on to have a career year, and it all started at WrestleMania 24, where he took part in his second "Money In The Bank" ladder match. Fighting off Chris Jericho atop the ladder, Punk managed to snag the briefcase and the guaranteed world title shot. He made the most out of the victory when he defeated Edge to become one of the most unlikely world champions in WWE history.

Foley's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Going into his no-holds-barred streetfight with Edge at WrestleMania 22, Edge made a lot about the fact that, despite having a storied career, Foley never quite had the "WrestleMania moment" that so many wrestlers live for. And so the "Hardcore Legend" made sure that the Mick Foley that came to the ring that night was not the jolly and loveable character fans had come to know, but rather the bloodthirsty madman that first earned a reputation for chaos as Cactus Jack. After being speared through a flaming table at ringside, Foley lost the match—but not before regaining the respect of anyone who thought he had lost his edge.

Why It's A Dream Match: Before he became a national presence in WCW in the early-1990s, Cactus Jack was one of those independent wrestlers who, through hard work, were quietly earning a reputation for being the

future of the sport. Some 15 years later, another young competitor was creating a similar buzz for his innovative ring style, and his skills behind the microphone—C.M. Punk. Fans still recall the night Foley shocked the world by winning the WWE championship on *Monday Night Raw* in 1998. Ten years later, jaws similarly dropped when Punk bested Edge for the World championship. And so this match would showcase two of the biggest cult favorites ever to achieve tremendous success in the big leagues of the sport. Fans of Ring of Honor may be especially amped up to see this battle, as the two engaged in an intense war of words in the company in 2005.

What Would Happen: Because both men earned their reputations by refusing to conform, it's hard to predict what this match would look like. With Foley involved, the match could turn into a wild brawl—loaded with broken tables, barbed-wire baseball bats, and insane dives from tall heights. On the other hand, Punk could look to mold the contest around his strengths—notably his Muay Thai skills and punishing kicks. While Foley may have a considerable size advantage, we'd still give Punk the (straight) edge in the match. As talented as he was, Foley made a name for himself more for the punishment he received than that which he inflicted. Conversely, Punk has racked up numerous upset victories during his WWE career, along the way winning the ECW, WWE World tag team, Intercontinental, and WWE World championships. And so, while he might come out battered and bloody, Punk would find a way to win this match.

The Undertaker (2007)

20 VS.

Goldberg (2004)



Photo by George Napolitano

Undertaker's WrestleMania Record: **16-0**



Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

Goldberg's WrestleMania Record: **1-0**

Undertaker's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: With an amazing 16 WrestleMania wins to choose from, it is tough to pick the most meaningful moment "The Phenom" has ever experienced at the annual super show. But, perhaps no WrestleMania victory was sweeter for The Undertaker than his 15th. At 42 years of age, and in his 17th year in WWE, many fans may have thought The Undertaker's best days were behind him. But at WrestleMania 23, 'Taker defeated Batista to capture his fifth world title. Perhaps more significantly, 'Taker helped deliver a match widely praised as one of the best of 2007.

Goldberg's Greatest WrestleMania Moment: Having competed at the "Showcase Of The Immortals" just one time, Goldberg's greatest WrestleMania moment is also his only one. At WrestleMania 20, Goldberg took on Brock Lesnar in a battle of two of the most dominant big men the sport had ever seen. The showdown had the makings of a true dream match—especially with Steve Austin serving as referee. But, unfortunately, by the time the match took place, fans had gotten word that both competitors were leaving WWE right after the bout. Goldberg went on to win the match, but it will be mostly remembered for the venomous reception it received by the resentful Madison Square Garden audience.

Why It's A Dream Match: Lots of wrestlers have reputations for dominance, but only a few have the statistics to back them up. Goldberg and The Undertaker both boast winning streaks that helped solidify their reputations as two of the sport's most indestructible

warriors. Goldberg's winning record during his first year in WCW helped make him one of the breakout stars of wrestling's Monday Night War era of the 1990s (the 173-0 streak didn't hurt, either). Similarly, The Undertaker's 16-0 winning streak at WrestleMania will likely never be duplicated. Limited to his time in WWE, the Goldberg that would compete in this match would be six years older than when Kevin Nash broke his streak at Starrcade 1998. But Goldberg was no less imposing during his year in WWE—a year in which he captured the World championship.

What Would Happen: Let's get this out of the way: If this match is taking place at an event named "WrestleMania," then odds are The Undertaker would win. While vulnerable to defeat during the rest of the year, The Undertaker has proved to be nothing short of invincible on the WrestleMania stage. Whether his streak is the product of The Undertaker's determination, his magical powers, or just plain good luck, it's hard at this point to imagine nearly anyone pinning his shoulders to the mat or making him submit at the "Granddaddy Of Them All." That's not to say Goldberg wouldn't have a fighting chance. During much of his memorable WCW career, Goldberg wasn't only winning most of his matches, he was doing it with ease. And even during his WWE run, Goldberg was picking up victories against formidable opponents including Kane, Triple-H, and Lesnar. So it would be far from a cakewalk (maybe a ropewalk) for The Undertaker, but we would expect his record would remain in tact.

JACK SWAGGER



Too Much,



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Too Soon, Too Dangerous

Jack Swagger came into ECW with a smile. He defeated every opponent Teddy Long could throw at him, with a smile. He took his first championship opportunity against Matt Hardy and won the ECW title, with a smile. But, at such a young age, is Swagger really capable of handling so much success so soon?

By Michael Moore

AS A GROUP of wrestlers huddled around a backstage monitor to watch Randy Orton win the 2009 Royal Rumble, ECW champion Jack Swagger leaned back in his chair and made a bold prediction.

"That's gonna be me next year," he said with a grin.

The other wrestlers didn't laugh or threaten Swagger with physical violence; they were simply stunned into silence. How could someone who had been with the company for barely more than four months make such a boastful claim?

But that's been Swagger's M.O. since he arrived in WWE. The 26-year-old has made a lot of bold claims and, to his credit, has backed up every one

of them. And why shouldn't Swagger be confident, or even cocky or conceited? He debuted in ECW in September, and just four months later won the ECW championship from Matt Hardy. In his first televised title defense, he cleanly—and very decisively—defeated Hardy.

Swagger's bravado and natural ability have gotten him this far. It's truly astonishing that someone who has been wrestling in WWE for such a short time could win his respective brand's biggest prize. However, the inevitable drought that seems to befall all young wrestlers after they jettison to the apex of the sport will be much less surprising.

"I've been around a long time," said ECW veteran Tommy Dreamer, "and it's almost like a rule—the



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In his first match on ECW, Swagger showed the dominance of a 10-year veteran. Josh Daniels was treated to a first-class Oklahoma-style beatdown when he faced the "All-American, American."

faster you reach the top, the longer you're gonna slump down the line. Sure, Swagger's an impressive kid who has all the tools. But he doesn't have experience and he hasn't faced any real adversity yet in the ring. It's all about learning lessons, and he hasn't had to learn many hard ones yet."

To make matters worse, Swagger's conceit only serves to make him the target of ECW veterans and newcomers who will make it their mission to see him fail. What the young champion needs at this juncture of his career is a mentor—a veteran, a manager, a partner—anyone who can help him keep his ego and his expectations in check.

Take Randy Orton, for example. Even though he sought to make his name by offing wrestling legends such as The Undertaker, Mick Foley, and Shawn Michaels, he benefited from the guidance provided by his father, Ric Flair, and Triple-H. In the end, he rebelled against them all, but he also learned from them how to be patient, prepare properly, and maximize his resources.

Unfortunately, Swagger seems so pre-occupied with his own success that he fails to

even recognize the need for a guiding hand.

"That's the difference between Randy Orton and Jack Swagger," the ECW champion said with a cocky grin. "I don't need Triple-H and Ric Flair. I don't need a manager, I don't need a partner, I don't need anybody riding my coattails!"

One veteran Raw wrestler, who asked not to be identified, scoffed at Swagger's comments.

"He's a big, young fish in a very small pond," the wrestler said. "I don't mean any disrespect to the guys on ECW, but take a look around that brand, Finlay, Mark Henry, Hornswoggle—Swagger isn't exactly stepping into the ring with Shawn Michaels or Edge."

True, ECW doesn't boast the deepest roster in WWE, so Swagger won't be faced with the constant barrage of challengers or the same quality of competition as his counterparts on Raw and Smackdown. But is he savvy enough at this point to use that to his advantage? Rather than rile his ECW foes, Swagger should be seeking out their advice on elements such as pacing, defending the title, and networking

with wrestlers who could help preserve his reign.

Instead, the cock-sure upstart seems content to sling verbal arrows. "The only thing Tommy Dreamer's gonna teach anybody is how to take a frying pan to the face," he said. "And what am I gonna learn from Mark Henry? How to waste the first decade of my career? Thanks, but no thanks."

But for all he's experienced in a relatively short time, the one thing Swagger hasn't had to experience just yet is a major defeat. As Sir Isaac Newton found out: What goes up must come down. Swagger may be atop the ECW mountain for now, but it is nearly impossible to believe that he will remain a champion for his entire career. At some point, the wins will become harder to achieve, championship gold will become more elusive, and self-doubt will replace all that self-confidence.

That's when the wrestling world will really see if the "All-

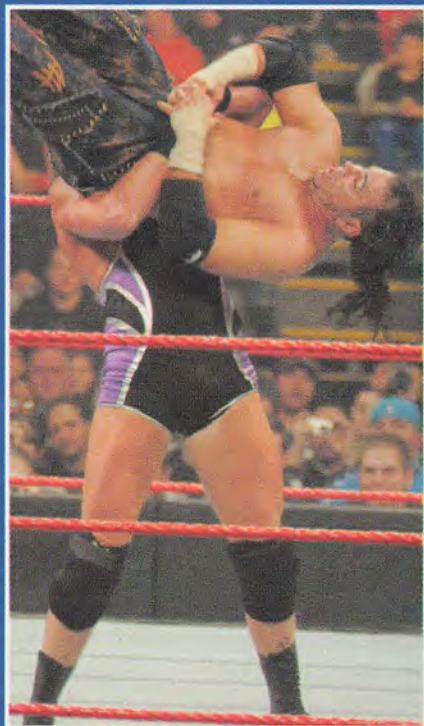


Photo by George Napolitano

If anyone was wondering how real Swagger's ECW title win was, he certainly answered their questions at the Royal Rumble when he dominated Matt Hardy in his first title defense.

American, American" has what it takes to last in this business. On the February 3 edition of Smackdown, Swagger felt the first loss of his relatively new career when he fell to Finlay in a non-title match. To his credit, the rookie didn't sulk, alibi, or melt down ... on the outside. But who really knows if a shaken grappler lurks behind that cocky veneer? Certainly none of the competitors on the ECW roster that can help Swagger put the loss behind him for good.

Swagger is not inclined to avail himself of such expertise. If Swagger doesn't want to listen to his ECW comrades, maybe he should consult Smackdown's MVP for a little advice. After all, it wasn't that long ago that Montel Vontavious Porter, just like Swagger, was being labeled a future headliner. His stock rose quickly but soon crashed dramatically, and he lost it all—the U.S. title, his own talk show segment, and nearly every one of his matches.

The brash MVP learned a lesson in humility, and only recently has he gotten his career back on track. "Last year flat out sucked," MVP said. "But you know what? Losing everything like that, it made me a stronger person, a better wrestler. Yeah, I fell into a funk, but I came out of it stronger. I guess I learned more by losing than I ever did by winning."

Given Swagger's makeup, such profound insight is destined to fall upon deaf ears. Swagger, like many young wrestlers, can't seem to grasp anything other than the "this-ride-is-gonna-last-forever" mentality, and he responded to MVP's comments like only an over-confident youngster would. "If knowledge is found in defeat," he said, "then MVP must be the smartest man alive."

MVP may not be the smartest man alive, but in wrestling terms, he's infinitely smarter than Swagger is right now. □

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If anyone can adjust the ECW champion's attitude, it's Finlay, who recently gave Swagger his first taste of defeat in a non-title match. Swagger put on a stoic face after the loss, but there's a good chance the setback has left the ECW champ rattled.



Photo by George Napolitano

Cocky, arrogant, strong—all words that can describe the "All-American, American." But the very attributes that can make Swagger an excellent champion can stymie his growth in a sport that can become very humbling very quickly.

UFC HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION **BROCK LESNAR**

Text By Harry Burkett
Photos Courtesy of Josh Hedges/UFC

**WHAT MMA
OFFERS THAT
PRO WRESTLING
COULD NOT**

THE PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING industry gave Brock Lesnar everything it could give: main-event status, the WWE World championship, more money than he had ever made in his life, fame beyond his dreams, and even his wife. But while WWE was feeding Lesnar clean wins over all the icons of the sport—Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, The Rock—those closest to him realized none of it would satisfy the competitive beast within the South Dakota native.

WWE was about to serve up Bill Goldberg on a silver platter at WrestleMania XX before Lesnar did the unthinkable: He left WWE to pursue what turned out to be an aborted career in the NFL.

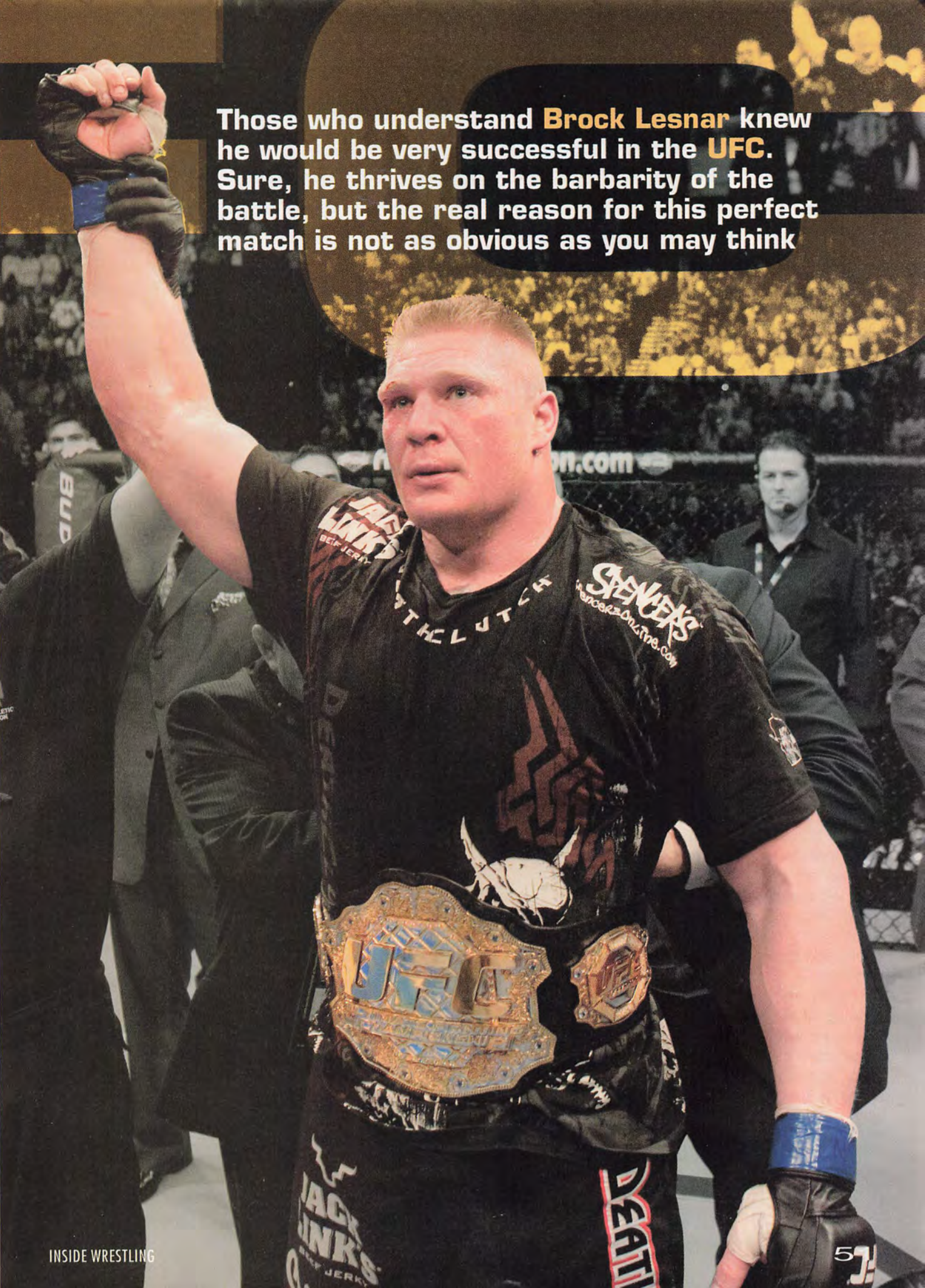
Upper management was furious, considering how much time and money had been invested in him. But, despite the fact that so many top stars had sacrificed so much to give him the rub, the resentment toward him quickly cooled in the locker room.

"If Goldberg had done that to us, we would've paid some UFC guy to break his legs," said a former WWE star, only half-jokingly. "But you have to understand Brock to know where his heart is, what makes him go. He has the most competitive nature I've ever seen. Everybody knows how he challenged

Brock Lesnar's UFC career has been as fast-rising as his WWE career was. After only three fights (one a submission loss to Frank Mir), Lesnar was thrown into a UFC heavyweight championship match with Randy Couture.



Those who understand **Brock Lesnar** knew he would be very successful in the **UFC**. Sure, he thrives on the barbarity of the battle, but the real reason for this perfect match is not as obvious as you may think



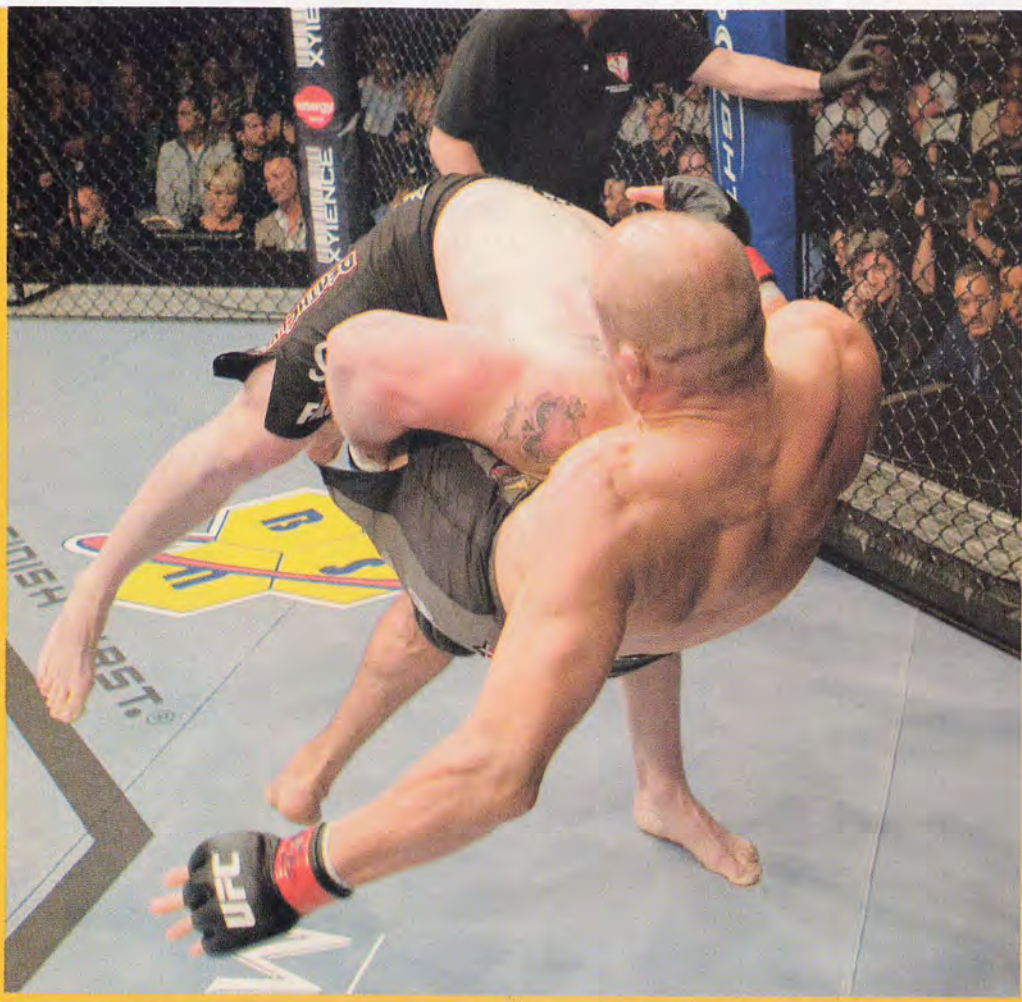
Angle to a shoot before one of the shows, and Angle humbled him. Next time I saw him, Brock had the biggest smile on his face. He was dreaming about the day he could get hold of Angle again. I don't think it ever happened, but Brock was just excited about the prospect of a new challenge."

When the NFL didn't work out, Ultimate Fighting Championship became the top challenge for Lesnar. Although he has supposedly dissed the wrestling industry, several former and current WWE stars—Kurt Angle, Steve Austin, The Undertaker, and John Bradshaw Layfield to name a few—have attended some of his MMA fights. Several were there for his wins over Min Soo Kim and Heath Herring, as well as his loss to veteran Frank Mir. They cheered as Lesnar pulverized 45-year-old Randy Couture with his anvil-sized fists to clinch the UFC heavyweight title on November 15 of last year.

Why would such big stars—with correspondingly large egos—show such solidarity for a man who seemingly left wrestling because it wasn't "tough enough" for him? Didn't he show a blatant lack of respect for the business they have sacrificed their bodies for?

"Again, that's a complete misreading of why Brock left WWE," insisted our former WWE wrestler. "That's become the popular assumption, but the boys know better. Brock respects the business, and that's why he busted his butt to reach the top. He didn't leave WWE because wrestling was too easy. He left WWE because *WWE* was too easy.

"Look at it from his perspective:



After starting the fight off a bit timidly, Lesnar found an opening after a stiff right hand left Couture's defenses weakened, giving him an opportunity to take the champion to the ground (above). Once Couture was on the ground, Brock had him right where he wanted him and he unloaded on Couture (below) to win yet another new trophy for the case.



BROCK LESNAR vs. BOBBY LASHLEY: PREVIEW OF THE INEVITABLE SHOWDOWN

Bobby Lashley has had only one MMA fight, but it isn't too early to speculate about what will happen when the former ECW champ finally gets in the ring against UFC heavyweight champion Brock Lesnar. We say "will" because Lashley has already indicated that a clash with Lesnar is inevitable.

"I am a wrestler, and Brock is a wrestler," he said in an interview with *The Miami Herald*. "If [Lesnar] wants to match skills, we match skills. There is going to be a meeting between me and Brock. There will be."

Lashley is right. This will be a fight between *wrestlers*. While attending Missouri Valley College, Lashley won three national amateur wrestling championships between 1996 and 1998, won the NAIA national wrestling championship in 1997 and 1998, and became a two-time Armed Forces champion. Lesnar's amateur wrestling background is even more impressive, with the NCAA Division I Championship in 2000 and the Big Ten Conference championships in 1999 and 2000 to his credit.

The tale of the tape doesn't give an

edge to either competitor. Both Lashley and Lesnar are 6'3" and around 270 pounds, and they were born within a year of each other, 1976 and 1977, respectively. Nevertheless, Lashley could prove to be a more formidable opponent than 220-pound Randy Couture, who was overwhelmed by Brock's sheer mass.

"Lashley needs to keep his distance and shoot the takedown ASAP," suggested former MMA trainer Dave Dickey, who owned Live Steel Fight Academy in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. "He needs to keep Lesnar off his feet and on his back. If his speed is there and he can nail him a couple of times, he could possibly take him down and submit him. Being the same size, he could tie him up in the side of the cage and make Lesnar waste energy."

Does Dickey dare to predict an outcome?

"If Lesnar wins, it will look like the same 'ground-and-pound' routine as all of his other fights. If Lashley wins, it will be by submission or fight stoppage. But he will not knock Lesnar out—no way."

—Harry Burkett

Lashley: The "Next Big Opponent"?



Photo by George Napolitano



Now that Lesnar sits atop the UFC heavyweight world, he has to keep a keen eye out for all comers. Whether it be Frank Mir—who is the only man to beat Lesnar in an MMA match—or Bobby Lashley, critics agree, Lesnar is the real deal.

In less than two years with the company, he'd won the King of the Ring, won the Royal Rumble, had become the undisputed WWE champion, and ended up with three reigns altogether. He'd beaten every top guy. It was the same old stuff night after night. Brock going to UFC has nothing to do with wanting 'harder hits' or 'real grappling.' Heck, if Brock wants physical danger, he can do some four-corner bomb matches in Japan. Brock is a goal-oriented person, and nothing drives him more than starting at the very bottom and steamrolling to the very top. He did it in WWE and now he's done it in UFC."

According to our source, Lesnar achieved the wrestling greatness he sought and wanted to continue pushing his career forward—even if it meant going in a completely different direction.

"That was Vince's crucial mistake," asserted our source. "He knew

Lesnar was a natural for wrestling, and he saw his enthusiasm for it. He was the perfect prototype of a WWE superstar. Then why not give him the World title, and the sun, moon, and stars right away? Vince should've dangled success in front of his nose a while longer, and he would've had Brock for at least a few more years."

Few MMA fans will forget the image of Lesnar raising his arms triumphantly after being presented the UFC heavyweight belt. UFC President Dana White probably assumes he has locked in a box-office draw for years to come. As long as the UFC can supply a constant flow of tougher, stronger, and more skilled challengers that will continually enhance Lesnar's self-esteem and mystique, its new champion will be happy. But, if Lesnar feels that he's simply repeating past successes, what may seem like the "Next Big Thing" could be the beginning of the end. □



C.M. Punk *Makes A Wish Come True*

Professional wrestlers are often depicted as menacing thugs that delight in causing pain. But when the Kids Wish Network and WWE heard about little Aubrey Raspotnik, C.M. Punk did what he could to ease hers

By Jeff Ruoss

Photos Courtesy of Kids Wish Network

MOST SEVEN YEAR OLDS concern themselves with simple things—the people living in the trees (you know, the ones who make the leaves move), the monster under their beds, and eating their vegetables. Beyond that, there isn't really much to their existence. Wake up, eat, play, sleep, repeat ... Life is pretty simple.

Then there are those special kids out there that must confront more serious matters.

Aubrey Raspotnik, a seven-year-old girl from Ludington, Michigan, who has a smile that can light up a

room and a personality that can fill it, is one of those children. The little firecracker, as her mom Cassandra refers to her, was always the life of the party, keeping everyone around her in stitches from the moment they met her.

But, when Aubrey began complaining of intense pain on the right side of her body, her young life became troubled. Doctors diagnosed Aubrey with neuroblastoma on her spine.

Neuroblastoma is a cancerous tumor normally found in infants and young children. News of cancer can rock



Along with a giant hug (above), C.M. Punk had a handful of goodies for Aubrey (below) when they finally got a chance to meet.



just about anyone. But the diagnosis is especially tough to take when the victim is so young.

Immediately, Aubrey underwent surgery to remove the tumor, which had connected itself to her right kidney and spine. The mass was excised from her kidney, but, as is often the case with cancer surgery, the doctors could not remove all the cancer from her spine.

This is when Cassandra learned about the Kids Wish Network, an agency that helps ill children live out their wishes and dreams. Cassandra was put in touch with Jill Atchinson, a Wish Coordinator, who helped make Aubrey's dream come true. When asked, Aubrey knew just what she wanted—to meet her idol, C.M. Punk.

"The meeting was set up by WWE and the location of the meeting was determined to be in Tampa, Florida," Atchinson said. "We flew Aubrey and her family to Tampa a day early and put them up in a hotel and sent them to some local attractions. WWE also provided the family with tickets to the wrestling match."



Punk wasn't the only one handing out gifts. Aubrey and the Kids Wish Network had a special plaque for the "Straight Edge Superstar" that would always be a reminder for the wish he helped fulfill.

So the meeting was set. The girl with the priceless smile was all ready to meet her straight-edge hero. After some sightseeing, Aubrey went to meet the former WWE World champion at a WWE-organized get-together.

"When [facing Punk in person], Aubrey was just in awe," Cassandra said. "Seeing the look on her face, it was beyond words. It was priceless. It was one of those unforgettable moments. It was awesome."

But the surprises didn't end there for Aubrey. Just when she thought she had seen it all, in walked the "Heartbreak Kid" Shawn Michaels. Michaels seemed to know Aubrey's story just as well as Punk did, which prompted Aubrey to shout, "Mom! C.M. Punk must have talked about me!"

After getting a chance to talk it up with the boys in the back, Aubrey and her family made their way to ringside, where they watched the matches as WWE's invited guests. "It was awesome compared to watching it on TV," Cassandra said. "Aubrey was just pointing out people left and right, she really enjoyed it."

It was a welcome break for a little girl and her family, although the reality of Aubrey's fight isn't over. With the cancer not fully removed, Aubrey must still take prescribed medications and undergo intense monitoring. But for one day, at least, the cancer didn't exist. Aubrey was given the chance to meet her heroes and the lives of all involved were touched in a profound way.

"Aubrey still brags about getting to meet C.M. Punk," Cassandra said. "You don't know how much this meant to our entire family!"

But something tells us Punk and Michaels do. □

KANE

"Inflicting pain is its own reward"

THE VIOLENT, UNPRE-
dictable Kane has never
been a man of many
words. The "Big Red Machine" has
always been able to accomplish
more with a single withering stare
and an evil glower than with a
dozen shouted threats. Whether
he's wrestling as a fan favorite or a
heel, the hulking 7', 323-pound
monster always seems on the brink
of snapping, and quite often does.

Of late, Kane's behavior has
been more bizarre than ever. After
feuding with Chavo Guerrero Jr. for
the ECW championship, he dropped
the title to Mark Henry in a triple
threat match that also involved The
Big Show. Kane then turned heel
again for no particular reason and
instigated a feud with Rey Mysterio
Jr. that lasted until Survivor Series.
He then became obsessed with
WWE Diva Kelly Kelly. Kane stalked
Kelly for a period of time before kid-
napping her. Just as suddenly he
then chose to focus his attention
elsewhere.

To many, The Undertaker's half-
brother is still primarily known as the
king of the inferno match and other
ultra-violent specialty bouts. He
spent much of his earlier career tag
teaming—capturing nine champion-
ships. But the former WWF cham-
pion (for one day in 1998) has also
compiled an impressive array of sin-
gles championships. When Kane
took the ECW championship to Raw,
he became the first wrestler in fed-
eration history to defend a specific
title on all three WWE brands.

Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer



Photo by Duane Long

***"Instead of telling my
opponents about the
torture I'm going to
put them through, I
give them empirical
evidence."***

sat down with Kane to discuss the
big man's recent actions, future
plans, and out-of-the ring appear-
ances for WWE.

**Q: Thank you for agreeing to this
interview. Although you are
one of WWE's most recogniz-
able stars, you've generally
had little interest in consent-
ing to be interviewed. You
have no catch phrases and
have little in general to say on
promos. Why is that?**

A: There are only so many adject-
ives to describe pain, and
actions speak louder than words.
Besides, I'm not one to talk for

the love of hearing the sound of
my own voice. I communicate my
intentions loud and clear when
the time comes.

**Q: Like the old saying goes,
"You've got to watch out for
the quiet ones," huh?**

A: Yes. Instead of telling my oppo-
nents about the torture I'm going
to put them through, I give them
empirical evidence.

**Q: Fans are used to seeing you
switch back and forth between
heel and fan favorite, but the
turns often seem to come with
little or no warning or expla-
nation. Of late, you've been
back on the rulebreaking side
of the equation. Which role do
you think suits you better?**

A: To be honest, I think I defy clas-
sification. It's never bothered me
whether the fans boo or cheer. It
doesn't matter to me. It doesn't
always matter to me if I win or
lose a match. Inflicting pain is its
own reward (grins).

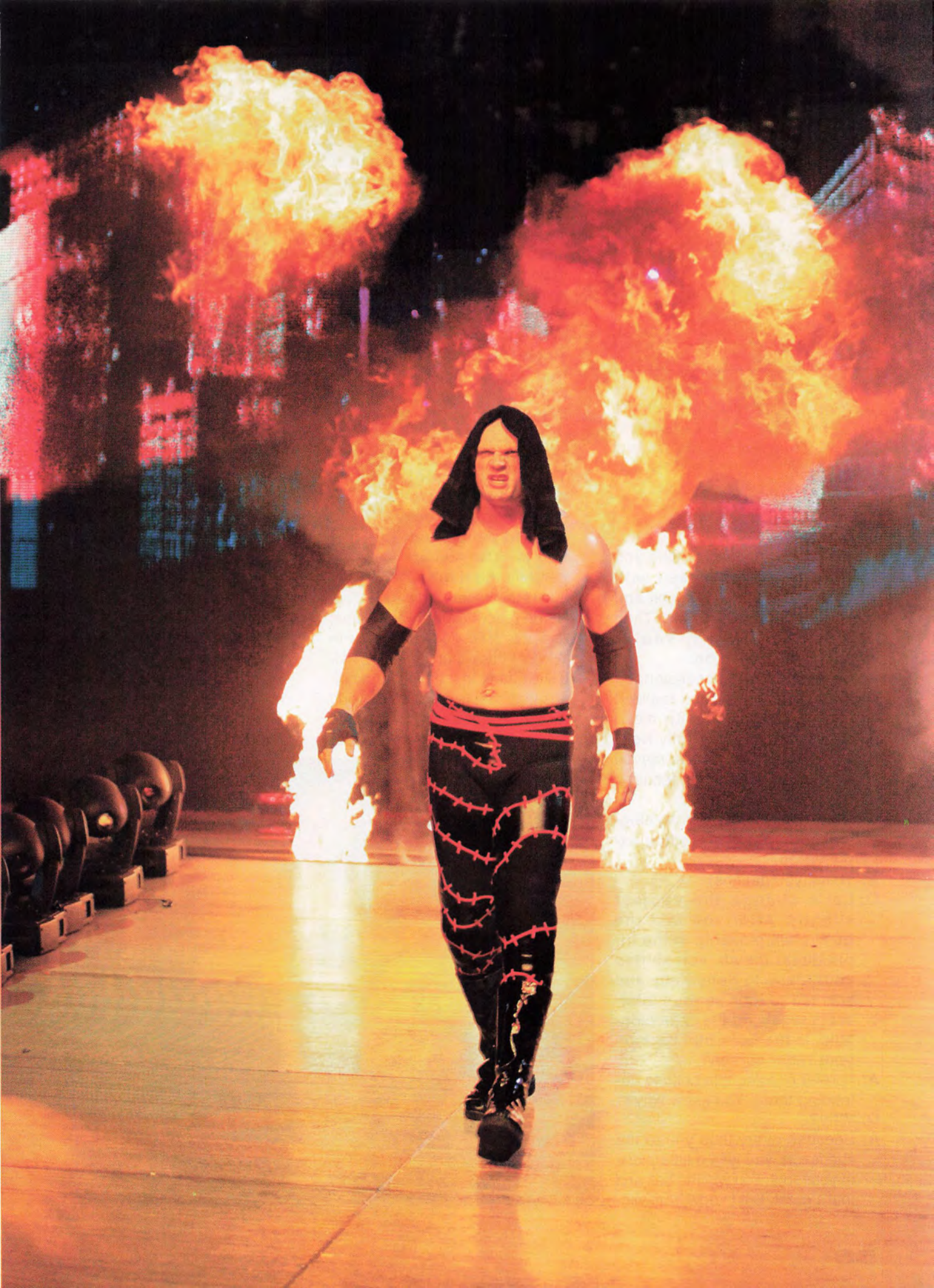
**Q: Well if you had to exclusively
be one or the other—fan favor-
ite or heel—which would you
choose?**

A: I'll reiterate. I don't really fit either
mold. Either way, I'm going to do
anything I want. Let me ask you
a question: Why, given a limited
amount of time, would you repeat
the same question twice?

**Q: I'll change the subject. What
exactly do you have against
Rey Mysterio?**

A: Very good. Try another.

**Q: What exactly happened with
your infatuation with Kelly**





"I know from winning my fair share of titles that once the belt is on you, you become the hunted. I prefer to be the hunter."

Kelly? For several weeks you were utterly obsessed with her, saving her one week and kidnapping her the next. Then just as suddenly, you've seemed to move on.

A: I wouldn't call it obsession. I'd say that I saw her and realized she needed to be with me. I admit, though, that Kelly Kelly was starting to take over maybe a little too much of my focus. It was time for a change.

Q: No offense, but that's an illogical and creepy sounding explanation.

A: Thank you (laughs).

Q: Let's change the subject slightly. After you lost the ECW championship in the triple threat match, you shifted your focus to Kelly Kelly and seemed to lose serious interest in regaining the championship. Is the ECW title back on your radar screen?

A: I prefer chasing title belts to defending them. You know why?

Q: Why?

A: Because every time you're the champion, you lose a little piece of your soul. You win the belt and that's great. But I know from win-

ning my fair share of titles that once the belt is on you, you become the hunted. I prefer to be the hunter.

Q: Well, you wouldn't turn down the belt if you won it again, would you?

A: Would I turn down the belt? Do I look crazy to you (laughs)?

Q: If you don't especially enjoy title belts, what do you think is the single biggest value that you brought to ECW?

A: In terms of my value to the ECW brand, you mean?

Q: Yes. Do you think that with your history and notoriety, you brought more attention to ECW and especially the title?

A: I don't think there's any question. Name recognition always helps, and I've had good success in WWE. I think that it's about visibility. I think that having champions that people around the world recognize elevates the brand and lends credibility to the title.



Photo by George Napolitano

Kane set a WrestleMania record for time of pinfall when he defeated Chavo Guerrero Jr. to win the ECW title at WM24 in nine seconds.

Speaking personally, though, I meant it when I said that the belt in and of itself isn't what drives me. Who knows, maybe that's why I've managed to collect more than my fair share of championships. I psych other people out, not myself.

For reasons known only to himself, Kane targeted Rey Mysterio Jr. after losing the ECW strap. It doesn't matter to Kane that he lost several bouts to the cruiserweight, just as long as he was able to hurt Mysterio.



Photo by Duane Long



One look at Kelly Kelly and fans can certainly understand how she could become the object of Kane's affections. But just as suddenly as he started stalking the Diva, Kane seemed to lose interest.

Q: One thing that hasn't changed much about you over the years is that wherever The Undertaker is, Kane is sure to appear sooner or later. So with that in mind, can we expect to another clash—or partnership—between the two of you at some point in the near future?

A: Possibly, but not right now. There's so much history there, good and bad, and I can never get my fill of tormenting The Undertaker. But it's also good to be on the same side when we're united in a specific goal.

Q: Kane, that's another schizophrenic answer. You basically said you enjoy teaming with him and you enjoy trying to destroy him.

A: Maybe it is a schizophrenic answer. But it's also an honest one.

Q: You've been one of WWE's more prolific wrestlers in terms of making appearances on non-wrestling television shows and radio programs, not to mention *See No Evil*, the film you starred in a couple of years ago. You've just had a DVD set come out, too. How

would you describe your appeal to fans and do you enjoy those outside appearances?

A: I absolutely enjoy doing appearances, and the movie, even though it was a lot of work, was also a great experience. I also enjoy representing the wrestling business, and maybe get people to look at what we do in a different light. Some of them have never even watched what we do, and we get to puncture the preconceived ideas that they have. One thing I've had people tell me off the air on these programs is that they never realized how athletic wrestlers really are. In the ring, you've got guys who are the size of NFL linemen or even bigger, but they are more mobile and can do a lot of very athletic feats. As far as my appeal to wrestling fans, I think that being bigger-than-life and sinister touches off something primal in people. That's why Kane has withstood the test of time.

Q: What's the most frequently asked question you get from fans?

A: I still get asked why I got rid of the mask. People aren't shy about sharing their opinions on whether they preferred me with or without it.

Q: And how about you? Which Kane look do you prefer?

A: It's easier and more comfort-



Photo by Duane Long

"I think that being bigger-than-life and sinister touches off something primal in people. That's why Kane has withstood the test of time."

able without the mask. Facial expressions are a big part of getting fans to tap into the emotion of the match. When you have the mask on, you've only got your body language to rely on. On the other hand, it was an adjustment to get fans used to seeing me without a mask. The mask had a certain aura of impenetrability about it, there was mystery and menace, and menace is my game. □



Photo by Gary Dineen

Although wrestling without a mask has its advantages, Kane admits the mask gave him a more ominous and foreboding appearance.

editors' roundtable

Does the WWE Universe live up to the hype?

"It seems to me that they've finally got it right. They're right on the cutting edge here. Most companies are content to establish themselves on Facebook or Twitter, but WWE has gone a step further and actually created its own social network."

—Brian Solomon

SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE all the rage these days. And if there's one thing WWE has proven adept at, it's keeping its collective finger on the pulse of popular culture. Thus, 2008 saw the rise of WWE Universe, the wrestling company's very own social network.

Theoretically, it should be a great way for fans to get together and discuss their mutual love of all things WWE. Right now, it's being heavily pushed across the board by Vince McMahon's marketing juggernaut, and "WWE Universe" as a term has come to represent

the company's collective fan base.

But what's the actual benefit of being a part of the WWE Universe, as opposed to just being a good ol' fashioned fan? Publisher Stu Saks sat down with Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda and Contributing Writers Brian Solomon and Louie Dee (both former WWE writers) to discuss this new phenomenon in sports entertainment fandom.

BRIAN SOLOMON: Stu, Frank, I'd just like to thank you guys for asking me to be a part of this roundtable. This is a first for me, and as someone who once worked inside the Tower, I think I have a lot of insight to offer.

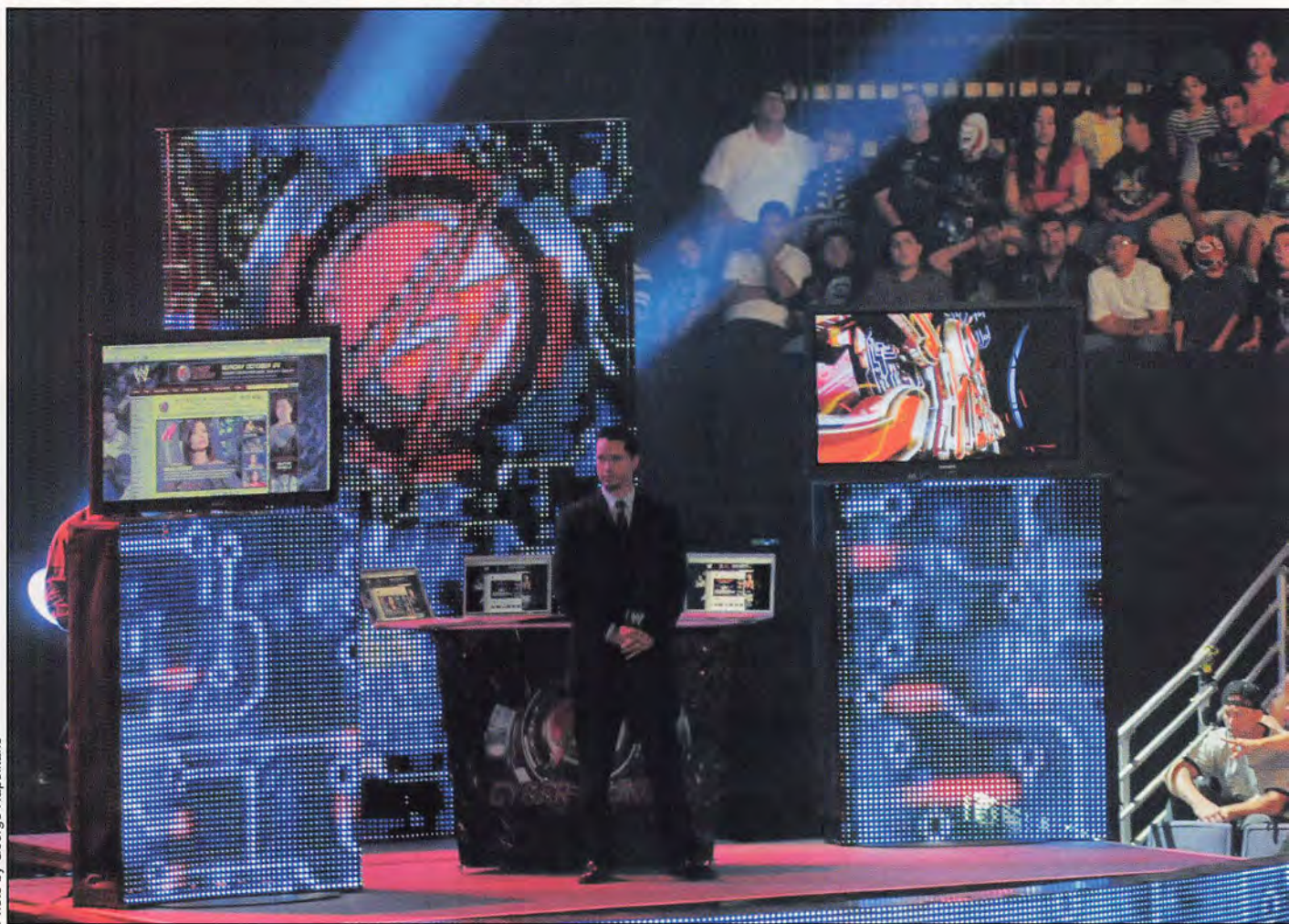


Photo by George Napolitano

LOUIE DEE: Same goes for me, guys. In fact, I worked directly on wwe.com during my time there, so I'm sure I can shed some light on things.

STU SAKS: The pleasure is ours, guys. We're glad to have you aboard. Let's get down to business, shall we? This WWE Universe has really popped up out of nowhere and become the most heavily hyped thing on WWE TV.

SOLOMON: Actually, Stu, it hasn't really just popped up completely out of nowhere. This is something that WWE has been cooking up for some time now. I

can remember brainstorming meetings back in my *WWE Magazine* days going back to at least 2006 when the company was trying to conceptualize something like this.

FRANK KREWDA: And what was the thinking behind it? WWE fans are among the most rabid and loyal in the world. Why mess with a good thing? Like they say, if it ain't broke ...

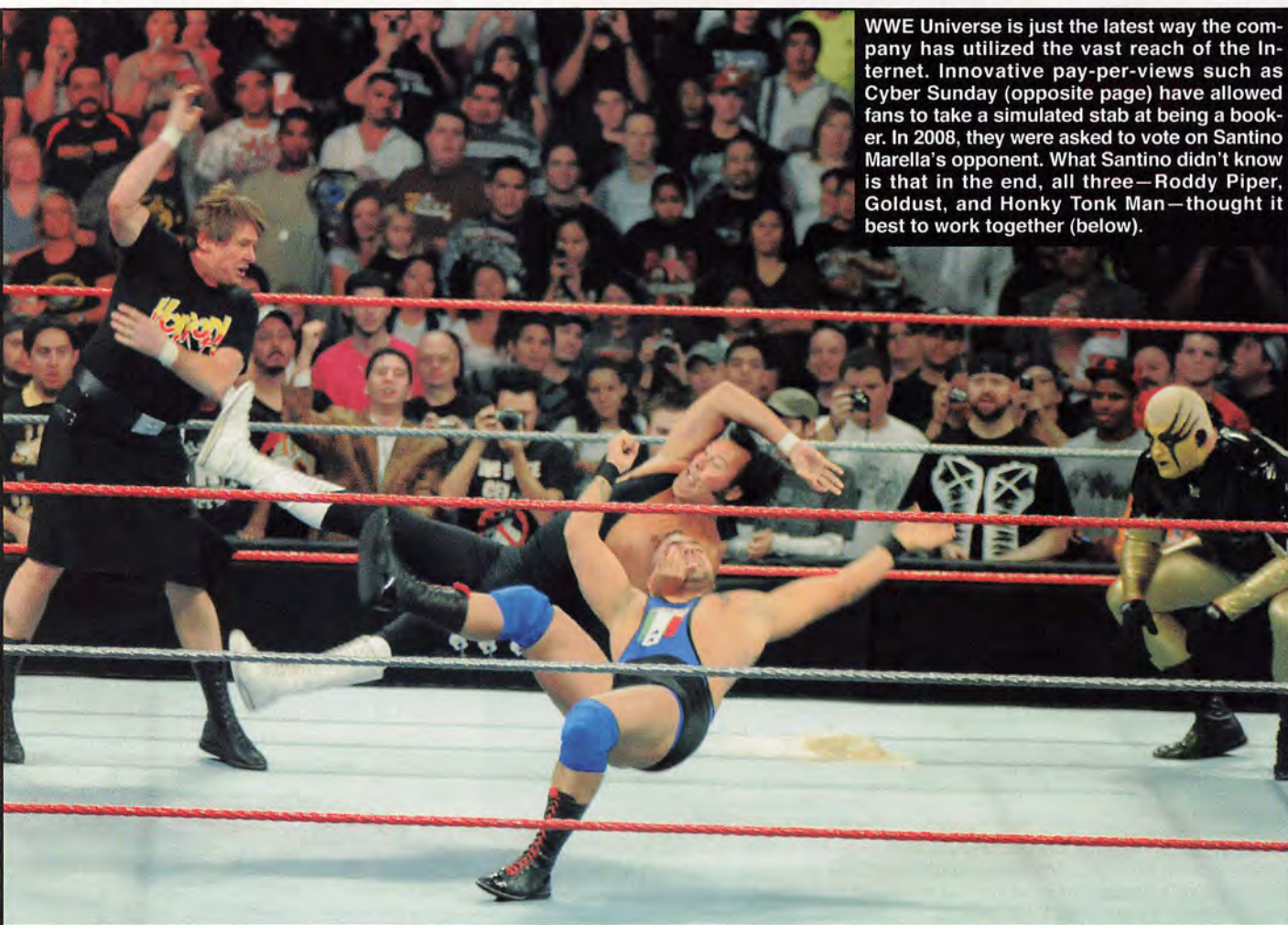
DEE: Vince didn't get where he is today by following that philosophy, Frank. He's never satisfied. It's all about bigger and better. WWE Universe was cooked up by the marketing types as a

way to get fans to be more interactive. And let's be honest: It makes it easier to sell people stuff if you have them all together in one place.

SAKS: I may not exactly be the youngest guy at the table, but I can see the point of that. Kids today practically live online, and sites like MySpace and Facebook are their prime destinations. Why not tap into that?

SOLOMON: That's exactly what got WWE thinking. It all started when somebody realized that there was no catchy name out there to describe the entire WWE fan base.

WWE Universe is just the latest way the company has utilized the vast reach of the Internet. Innovative pay-per-views such as *Cyber Sunday* (opposite page) have allowed fans to take a simulated stab at being a booker. In 2008, they were asked to vote on Santino Marella's opponent. What Santino didn't know is that in the end, all three—Roddy Piper, Goldust, and Honky Tonk Man—thought it best to work together (below).



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"It's basically a fancy new way that WWE has cooked up to milk even more money from its fans, possibly to gather demographic information about them, and leverage that to its financial advantage."

—Frank Krewda

Everybody went around scratching their heads over it, month after month, until some lucky guy or gal came up with WWE Universe. They wanted to generate that same sense of belonging that's made those other sites you mentioned such massive successes.

KREWDA: But at the risk of sounding old-fashioned, is any of this putting butts in seats? Is it putting faces in front of the TV? And what are fans getting out of WWE Universe that they can't get a mil-

lion other places on the Internet? It's the news and info that WWE deems safe for fan consumption, and you better believe they monitor the use of their intellectual property like hawks.

DEE: In all fairness, I have to correct you there, Frank. I'm not the biggest admirer of the whole WWE Universe thing, but one thing WWE has amazed me with is how they've been willing to let stuff go up online that isn't always necessarily complimentary.

SOLOMON: Well, Lou, I think you'll back me up on this, but that really stems from their desire to beat the other sites at their own game. They want to be first to break all the news, even if that news might shoot them in the foot. It's that mentality that's driven WWE Universe: Give the fans what they want before anyone else, and do it better.

SAKS: Yes, and simply by stamping that official WWE logo on everything, it immediately becomes more appealing to the average fan. It makes it legit.

KREWDA: But nobody's answering my question. Other than "stamping a logo on everything," what are they offering their fans that's of real value?

DEE: This may just be a generational thing, Frank. There are a lot of young people who find a lot of value in social networking, in connecting with other people online with common interests. It becomes an end in itself. That said, I just don't think it's something WWE can sustain for the long haul. It's website has gone through so many complete overhauls that I've lost count of them. If they start tinkering around too much with it, fans aren't going to take very kindly to it.

SOLOMON: I agree that it's been a long and bumpy road for WWE over the past dozen years, getting its online presence to where it is today. But it seems to me that they've finally got it right. They're right on the cutting edge here. Most companies are content to establish themselves on Face-



Although Trish Stratus makes few appearances for WWE, she has a blog, which she updates often on WWE Universe. Fans know they are actually reading what the seven-time women's champion is writing as opposed to sites such as Facebook, where fans aren't sure if it's the real Trish or not.

book or Twitter, but WWE has gone a step further and actually created its own social network. It's like you were saying, Lou, it's all about "bigger and better."

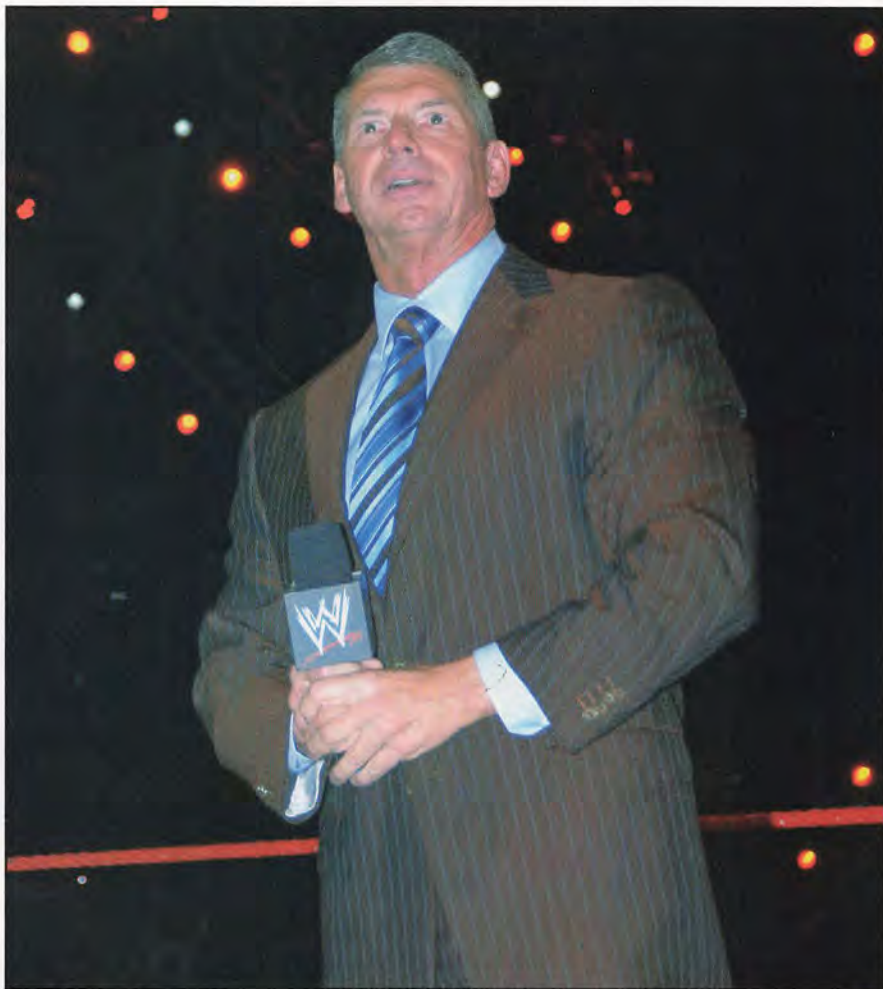
KREWDA: You forget, Lou also mentioned how it helps them sell stuff. Can we be honest here, and call this for what it is? It's basically a fancy new way WWE has cooked up to milk even more money from its fans, possibly to gather demographic information about them, and leverage that to their financial advantage.

SAKS: And how is that any different from any other new technology or development we've seen come along? Pay-per-view, for example, was ushered in as a way to "sell tickets" to more fans than you could ever possibly fit inside an arena. The bottom line for WWE may still be the almighty

dollar, but they're no different from any other sport or entertainment entity out there.

SOLOMON: And if the fans can get some enjoyment out of it along the way, and take part in creating a sense of community, why knock it?

SAKS: We could keep going round and round on this, but I think Louie hit the nail on the head once again when he mentioned the generational issue. This is just something that may mean a heck of a lot more to the younger fans than anyone else. But the young fans are the lifeblood of the business, and always have been. Right now, it seems to be taking off among the WWE faithful. Whether they're getting anything out of it or not may be beside the point. They're getting a big kick out of it, that's for sure, and that seems to be enough—for the time being, anyway. ☐



If WWE Universe is for the fans, then what does WWE get out of it? Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda questions if this is really a good thing for the fans, or if it is just another way for old Vinnie Mac to pad his wallet.

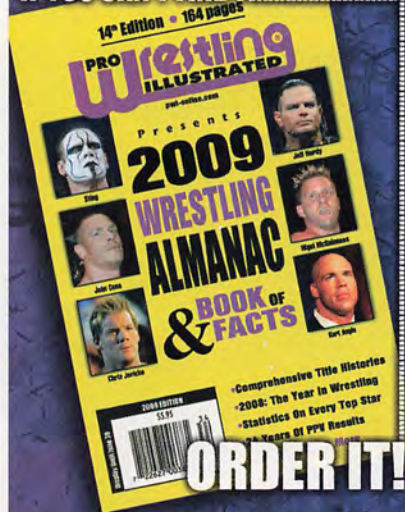
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wrestling timeline

DECEMBER 11, 1974:

Oscar Gutierrez is born in the 619 area code of San Diego, California.

November 6, 1994:

Makes U.S. debut as part of a six-man tag match at When Worlds Collide pay-per-view, co-promoted by AAA and WCW, in Los Angeles.

June 16, 1996:

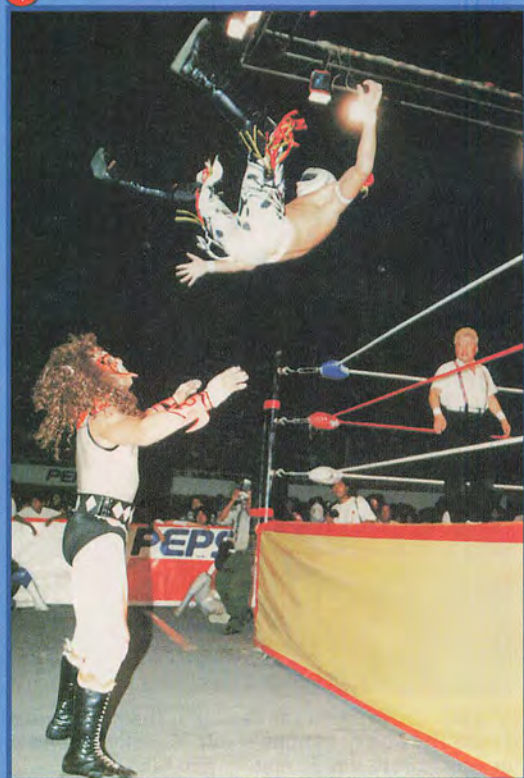
Loses WCW debut against cruiserweight champion Dean Malenko at The Great American Bash.

April 30, 1989:

Gutierrez, named after his uncle Rey Mysterio Sr., makes his professional debut at the age of 14 in an unsanctioned match at a Mexican church.

September 16, 1995:

Defeats Psicosis in ECW debut at the promotion's Gangstas Paradise card in Philadelphia.



Rey Mysterio Jr.

INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport



July 8, 1996:

Captures first of six WCW cruiserweight championships, defeating Malenko on *Nitro*.



April 6, 1997:

Wins highly anticipated showdown against Ultimo Dragon at Spring Stampede pay-per-view.

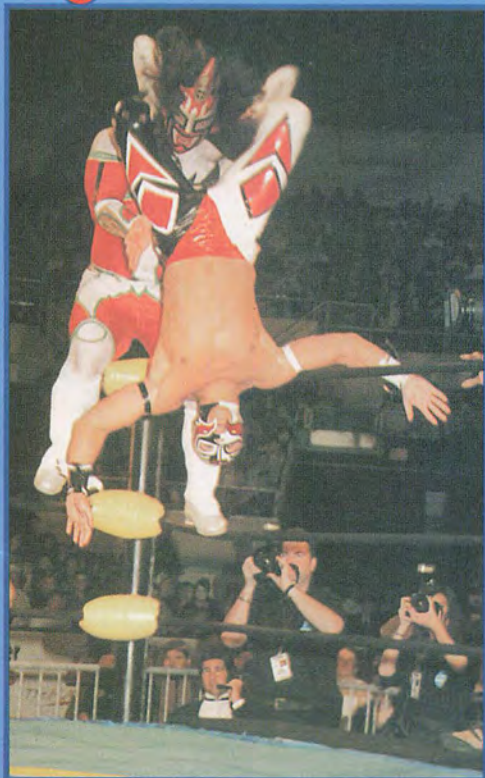
January 15, 1998: Captures the cruiserweight title for a third time when he defeats former AAA rival Juventud Guerrera.

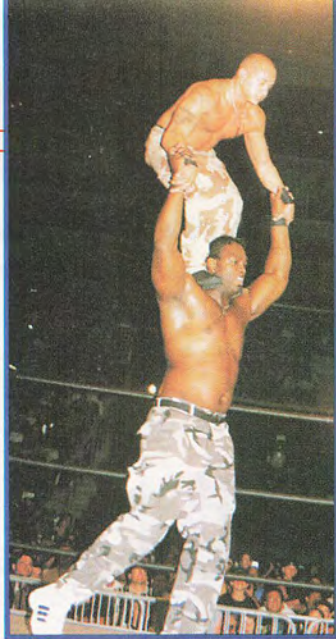
December 29, 1996:

Beaten by Japanese counterpart Jushin Liger at Starrcade 1996.

October 26, 1997:

Defeats Eddie Guerrero in a title vs. mask match at Halloween Havoc for his second cruiserweight title.





July 11, 1999:

Now part of Master P's No Limit Soldiers, Rey, Konnan, Swoll, and Brad Armstrong beat Curt Hennig, Bobby Duncum Jr., Barry Windham, and Kendall Windham at Bash at the Beach.

July 12, 1998: After a six-month layoff due to injury, returns at Bash at the Beach with a pin of Chris Jericho.

March 15, 1999:

Wins fourth cruiserweight title, beating Billy Kidman.

February 21, 1999:

By stipulation, loses mask when he and Konnan are beaten by Kevin Nash and Scott Hall at SuperBrawl 1999.

March 28, 1999:

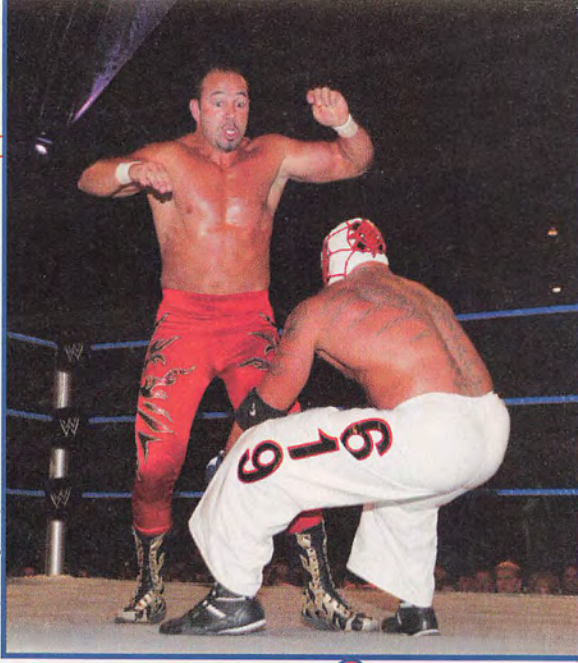
Teams with Kidman to win the WCW World tag team championship from Malenko and Chris Benoit.

April 26, 1999:

Beats Psicosis for fifth cruiserweight title in Fargo, North Dakota.



Photo by George Napolitano



September 4, 2000:

In the waning days of WCW, Rey and Juventud Guerrera retain the WCW World tag team title by defeating the rap group Insane Clown Posse on an episode of *Nitro*.



July 25, 2002:

Signs a deal with WWE and defeats Chavo Guerrero Jr. in his debut match on Smackdown.

October 20, 2002:

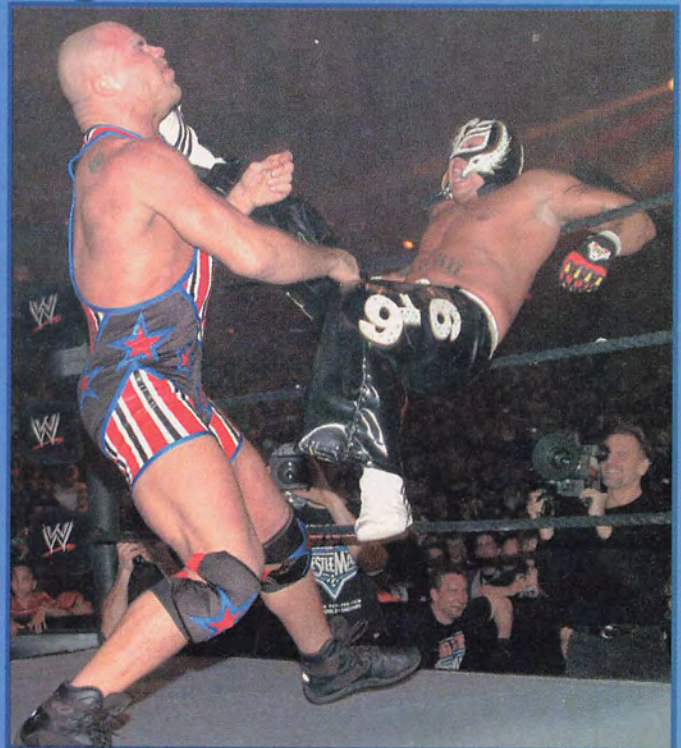
Nearly captures his first piece of WWE championship gold at No Mercy, but he and Edge are defeated by Angle and Benoit in the finals of the WWE tag team title tournament.

March 26, 2001:

On the final episode of *Nitro*, Rey and Billy Kidman capture the WCW cruiserweight tag team championship, defeating Kid Romeo and Elix Skipper. The title would be scrapped by the WWF.

August 25, 2002:

Kurt Angle proves to be too much for Rey as he falls to the former Olympian at SummerSlam 2002.



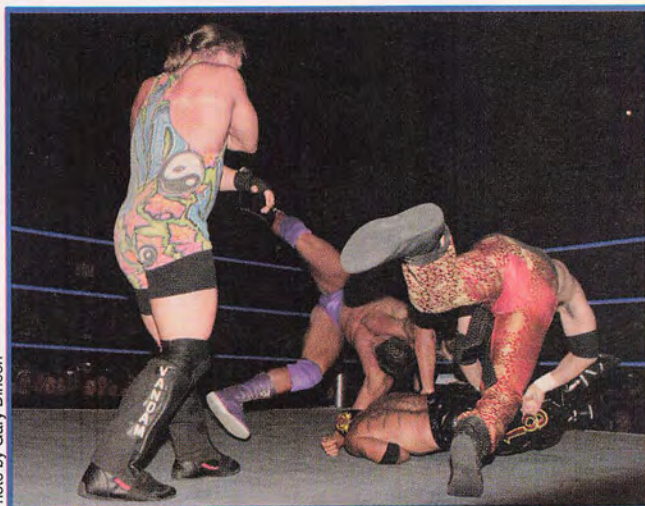


Photo by Gary Dineen

March 30, 2003:

Makes his WrestleMania debut, losing to cruiserweight champion Matt Hardy.

March 14, 2004:

After losing and chasing the gold for the rest of 2003, Rey fails to capture the title in the Cruiserweight Open at WrestleMania XX.

December 9, 2004:

Rey and Rob Van Dam win the WWE tag team title from Renee Dupree and Kenzo Suzuki on Smackdown.

June 5, 2003:

Rey captures the WWE cruiserweight championship by defeating Jeff Hardy on Smackdown.

August 15, 2004:

Rey, Billy Kidman, and Paul London fall to the Dudley Boyz in a six-man tag team match at SummerSlam 2004.

February 20, 2005:

Pairing with longtime nemesis Eddie Guerrero, Rey captures the WWE tag team title at No Way Out by defeating The Basham Brothers.

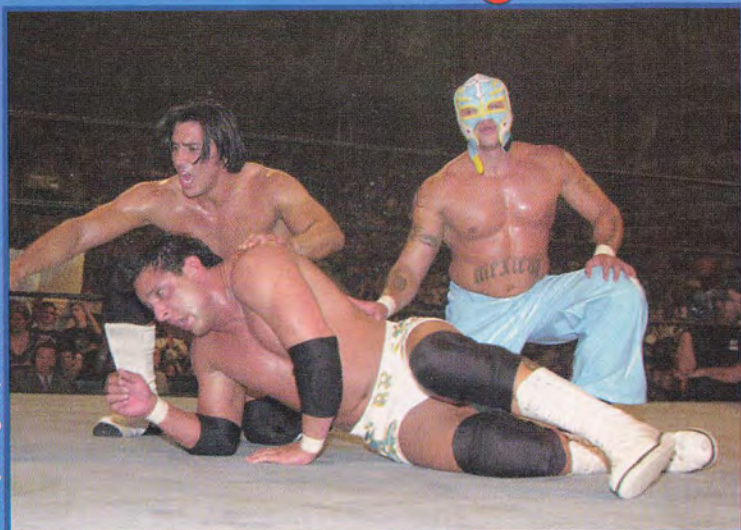


Photo by George Napolitano



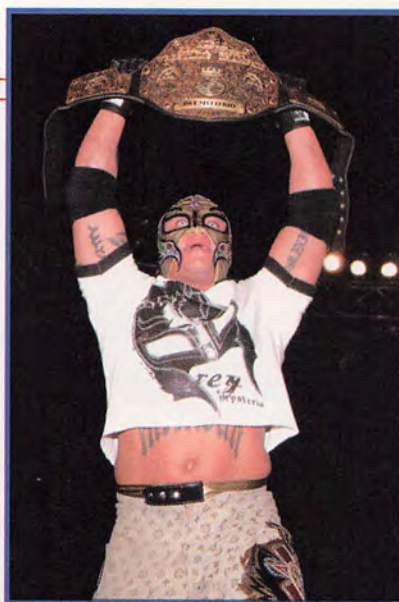


April 3, 2005:

Tensions rise following a well-fought grudge match won by Rey over Guerrero at WrestleMania 21.

August 21, 2005:

Retains custody of his son, Dominick, by defeating Eddie Guerrero at SummerSlam.



April 2, 2006:

Rey reaches the pinnacle of the sport by capturing the WWE World championship at WrestleMania 22 in a three-way match with Angle and Randy Orton.

June 12, 2005:

At the first ECW One Night Stand, Rey and Psicosis resume their feud of a decade earlier. Rey would emerge victorious.

January 29, 2006:

In a monumental upset, Rey wins the 2006 Royal Rumble after entering the match in the second slot, thus earning a World championship match at WrestleMania 22.

July 23, 2006:

Loses the WWE title to King Booker at The Great American Bash after supposed-ally Chavo Guerrero Jr. costs him the match.

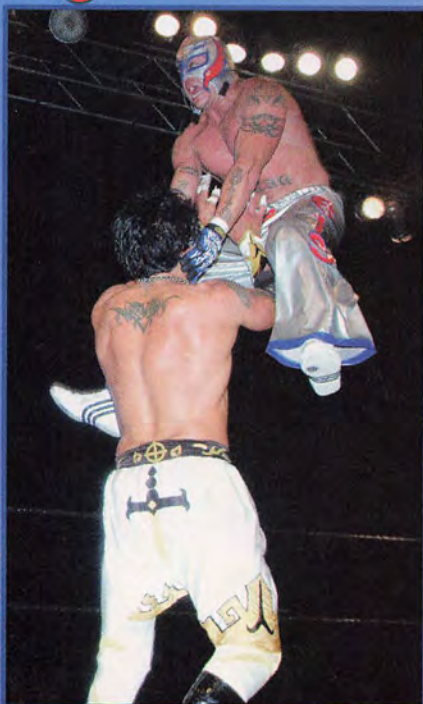


Photo by George Napolitano

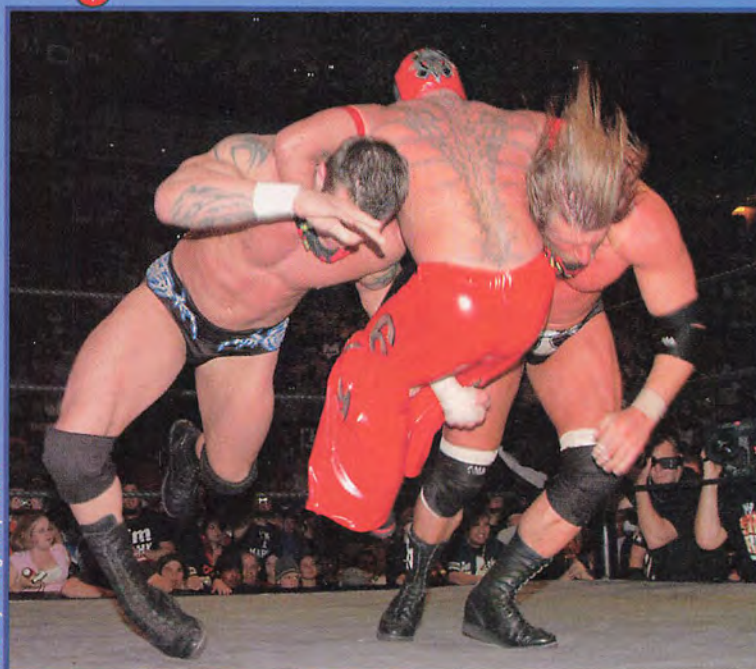


Photo by George Napolitano

wrestling timeline

Photo by George Napolitano



October 20, 2006:

In an "I Quit" match on Smackdown, Rey is defeated by Chavo and forced to leave WWE.

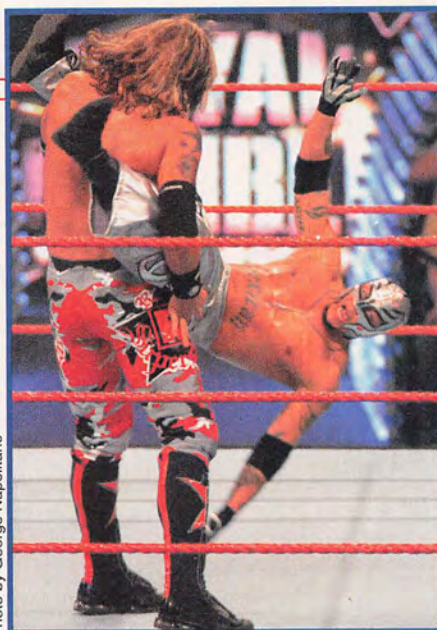
October 28, 2007:

The fans vote Rey into a stretcher match—which he wins—against Finlay at Cyber Sunday.

January 27, 2008:

Facing outside interference from Vickie Guerrero, Chavo Jr., Curt Hawkins, and Zack Ryder, Mysterio loses to World champion Edge at the Royal Rumble.

Photo by George Napolitano

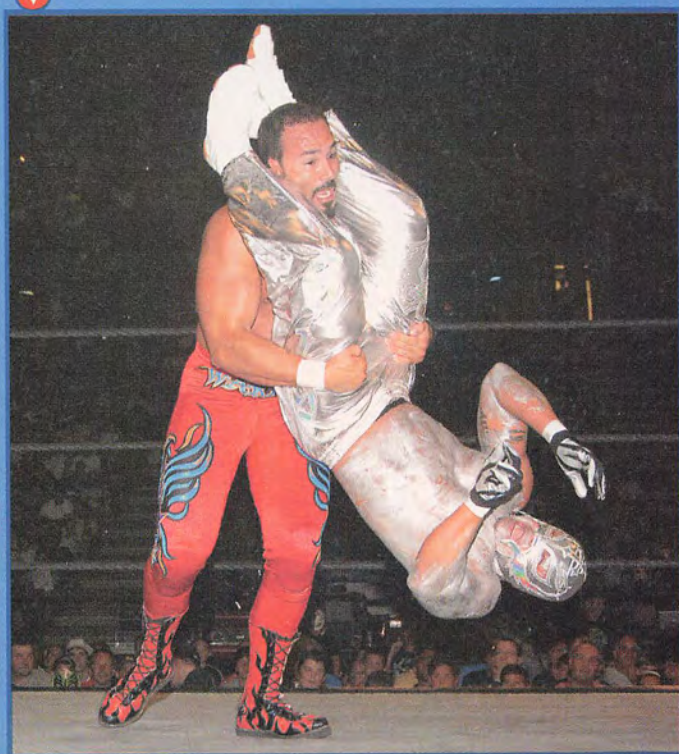


August 26, 2007:

After a lengthy rehabilitation stint, Rey returns to the WWE lineup and defeats Chavo in a grudge match at SummerSlam 2007.

January 4, 2008:

Beats Edge on Smackdown to win the "Beat The Clock Challenge" and earn a World title shot.



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September 7, 2008:

Competes in the Raw championship scramble match at Unforgiven, won by Chris Jericho.

December 1, 2008:

Prior to his match with The Miz, Mysterio is attacked by Mike Knox, who would stalk him for months to come.

January 19, 2009:

Wins by DQ against Knox on Raw, but takes a serious beating in the process.

June 23, 2008:

Drafted to Raw for the first time.

October 5, 2008:

In a feud that came out of nowhere (and went just as far), Rey defeats Kane by disqualification at No Mercy to keep his mask.

December 20, 2008:

As part of WWE's *Tribute To The Troops*, Rey pairs up with John Cena and Batista in a victorious effort and Jericho, Orton, and Big Show.

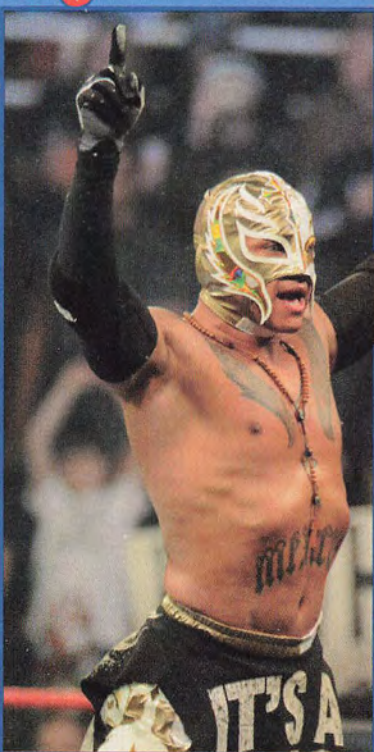
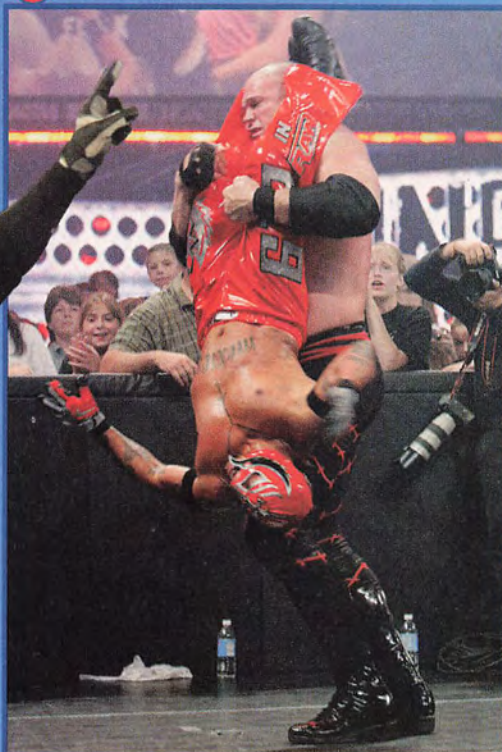


Photo by George Napolitano



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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended February 10, 2009

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI
(June 28, 2008; from Joe Doering & Keiji Muto; Osaka, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KAZ HAYASHI
(February 6, 2009; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: KEIJI MUTO
(September 28, 2008; from Suwama; Yokohama, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RICKY LANDELL
(October 11, 2008; from Larry Zbyszko; Indianapolis, IN)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TOMMY TROUBLE
(November 22, 2008; from Frederick of Hollywood; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: ROB ECKOS
(January 24, 2009; from Sean Royal; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MIKE REED & J.J. THE CREW GUY
(September 27, 2008; from Bryan & Matt Logan; Newark, DE)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JACK SWAGGER
(January 12, 2009; defeated Matt Hardy; Sioux City, IA)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ERIC ESCOBAR
(December 11, 2008; defeated Sheamus O'Shaunessy; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TYLER REKS & JOHNNY CURTIS
(December 11, 2008; from D.H. Smith & T.J. Wilson; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TYLER BLACK
(December 20, 2008; Go Shiozaki; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ERICK STEVENS & RODERICK STRONG
(December 20, 2008; from Jason Blade & Kenny King; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: CHRIS JONES
(October 11, 2008; from Sal Rinauro; Crystal River, FL)

IWA: MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: DINGO
(June 20, 2008; from Chuck Taylor; Sellersburg, IN)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEVIN KNIGHT
(May 18, 2008; from Travis Blake; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(January 4, 2009; from Keiji Muto; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BROTHER RAY & BROTHER DEVON
(January 4, 2009; from Togi Makabe & Toru Yano; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TIGER MASK IV
(January 4, 2009; defeated Low Ki; Tokyo, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BLUE DEMON JR.
(October 25, 2008; from Adam Pearce; Mexico City, Mexico)

NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MIKE QUACKENBUSH
(May 11, 2007; from Tiger Mask IV; Portage, IN)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER
(October 4, 2008; from Phoenix Star & Zokre; Robstown, TX)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 27, 2008; from Amazing Kong; Cape Girardeau, MO)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: APOC
(February 4, 2009; from Vaughn Lillas; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ADAM REVOLVER & TED McNALER
(February 7, 2009; from Scott Cardinal & Dirty Money; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: MIKE MONDO
(February 7, 2009; from Johnny Punch; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MELODY
(November 12, 2008; from SERENA; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CHRIS HERO
(July 6, 2008; from Human Tornado; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT & NICK JACKSON
(August 31, 2008; from Jimmy Jacobs & Tyler Black; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: KENSUKE SASAKI
(September 6, 2008; from Takeshi Morishima; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KENTA
(October 13, 2008; from Bryan Danielson; Hiroshima, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AKITOSHI SAITO & BISON SMITH
(May 23, 2008; from Naomichi Marufuji & Takeshi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: NIGEL MCGUINNESS
(October 6, 2007; from Takeshi Morishima; Edison, NJ)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KEVIN STEEN & EL GENERICO
(September 19, 2008; from Tyler Black & Jimmy Jacobs; Boston, MA)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 26, 2008; from Sara Del Rey; Berwyn, IL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: AWESOME KONG
(October 23, 2008; from Taylor Wilde; Las Vegas, NV)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: STING
(October 12, 2008; from Samoa Joe; Chicago, IL)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM
(January 11, 2009; defeated Jay Lethal & Consequences Creed and Matt Morgan & Abyss in a three-team match; Charlotte, NC)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: ALEX SHELLEY
(January 11, 2009; defeated Chris Sabin in the finals of a tournament for the vacant title; Charlotte, NC)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: C.M. PUNK
(January 19, 2009; from William Regal; Chicago, IL)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: JOHN CENA
(November 23, 2008; from Chris Jericho; Boston, MA)

WWE WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JOHN MORRISON & THE MIZ
(December 13, 2008; beat C.M. Punk & Kofi Kingston; Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)

WWE CHAMPION: EDGE
(January 25, 2009; defeated Jeff Hardy; Detroit, MI)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CARLITO & PRIMO COLON
(September 26, 2008; defeated Curt Hawkins and Zack Ryder; Columbus, OH)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: SHELTON BENJAMIN
(July 20, 2008; from Matt Hardy; Uniondale, NY)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MELINA
(January 25, 2009; defeated Beth Phoenix; Detroit, MI)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: MARYSE
(December 22, 2008; defeated Michelle McCool; Toronto, Ontario, Canada)



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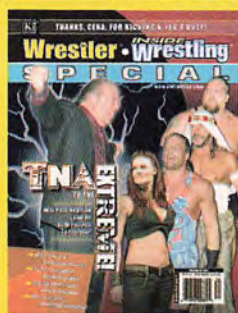


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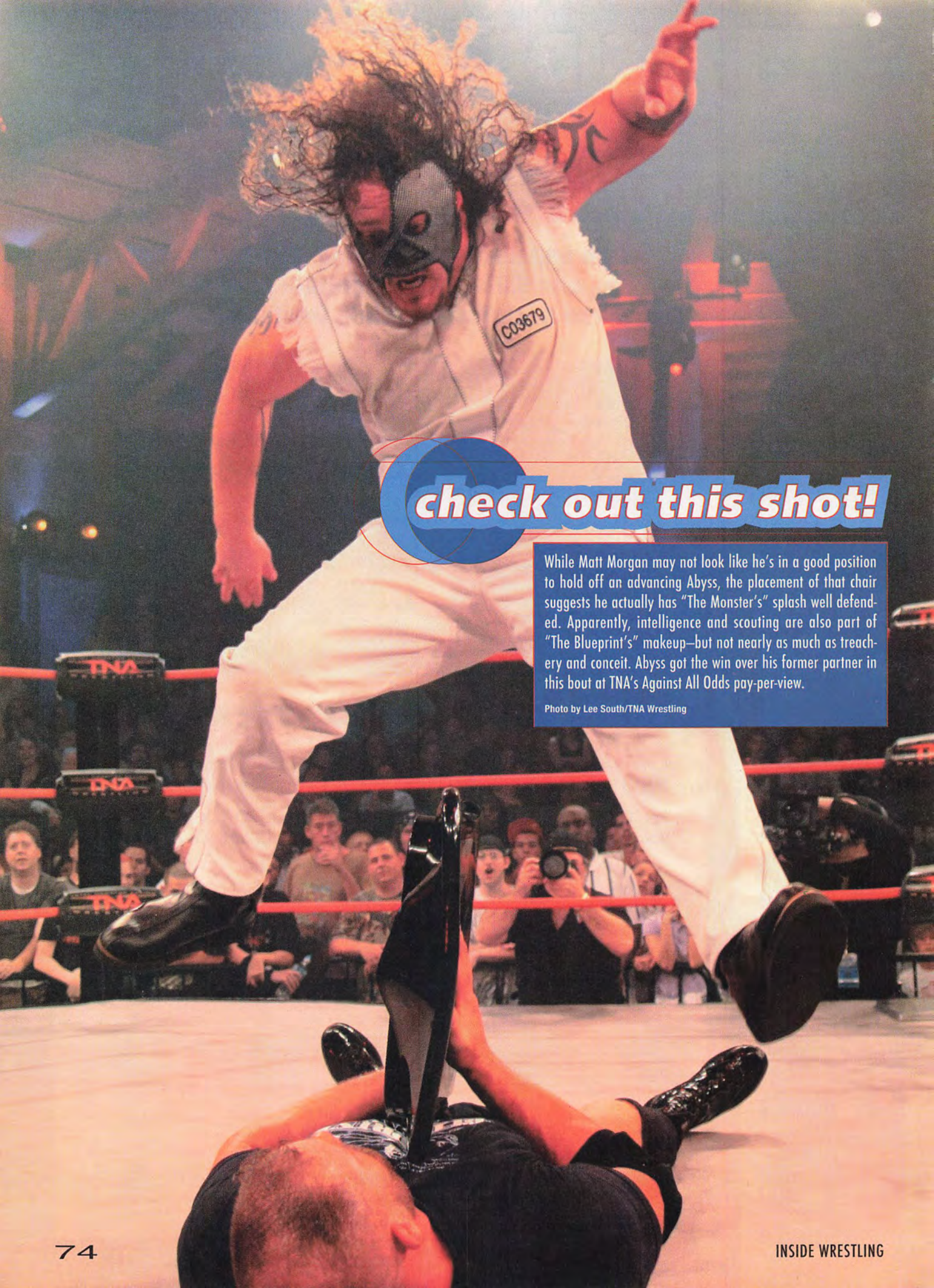
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check out this shot!

While Matt Morgan may not look like he's in a good position to hold off an advancing Abyss, the placement of that chair suggests he actually has "The Monster's" splash well defended. Apparently, intelligence and scouting are also part of "The Blueprint's" makeup—but not nearly as much as treachery and conceit. Abyss got the win over his former partner in this bout at TNA's Against All Odds pay-per-view.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling